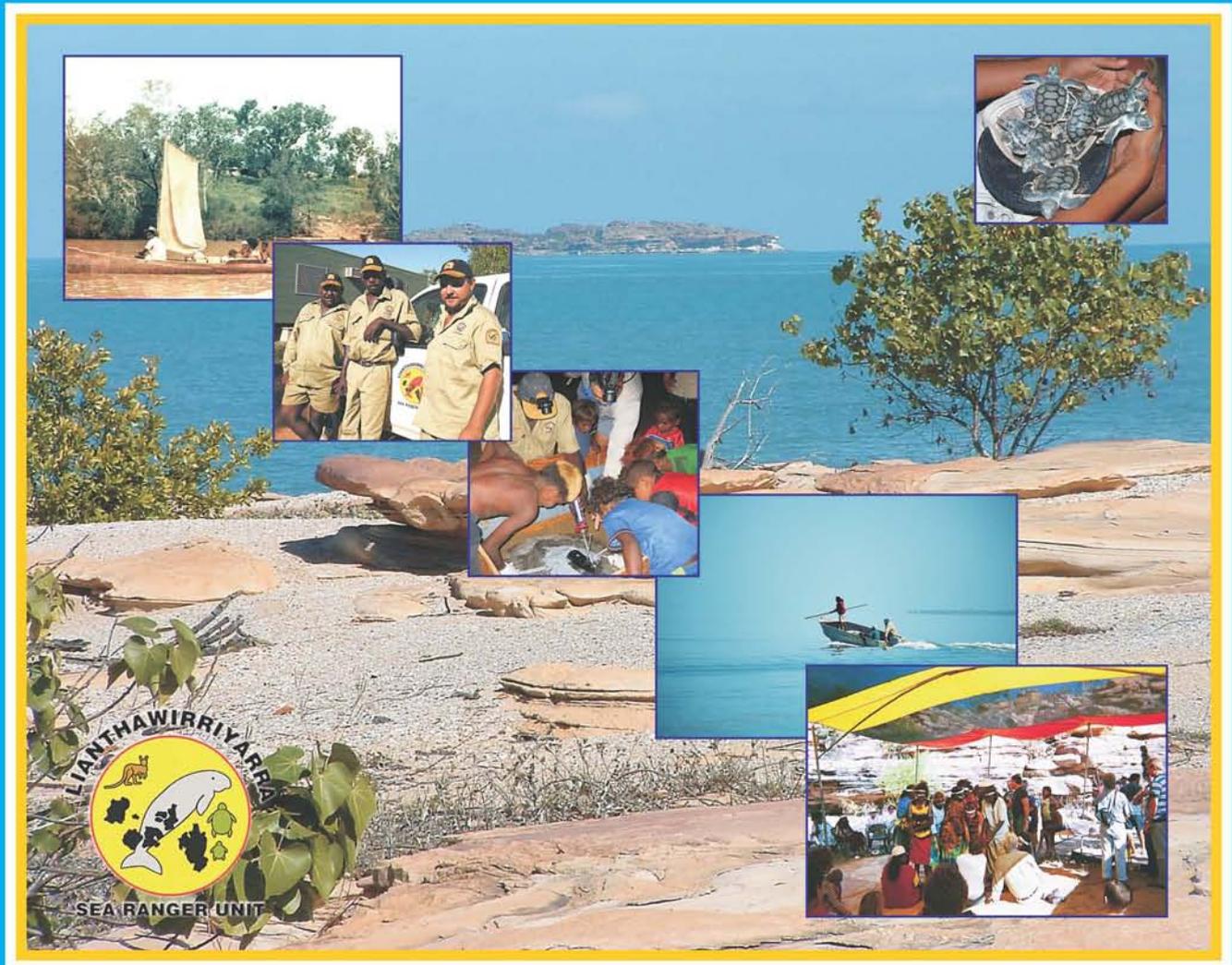


Barni-Wardimantha Awara Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan



Principal Authors: John Bradley and Yanyuwa Families

Prepared on behalf of *Yanyuwa* Traditional Owners
by the *Mabunji* Aboriginal Resource Association

Warning:

We wish to advise readers that the names and photographs of some people who contributed to this plan but have since passed on are found in this book.

After meeting with family and friends we, the Yanyuwa people, decided that these names and these photographs should be included in these pages, so that they will not be forgotten but will live on in memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Sea Country Plan is dedicated to the memory of the old people who made it possible. Without their knowledge, commitment and vision for country this plan could not have been written. Sadly they have since passed on but we have included their names here so that their children and others will remember them and the things they did.

Old Tim Rakawurlma, Mussolini Harvey, Nero Timothy, Johnson Timothy, Don Miller, Ron Rickett, Stanley Matthews, Isaac Walayungkuma, Dinny McDinny, Old Pyro Dirdiyalma, Eileen McDinny, Nora Jalirduma and Ida Ninganga.

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- Steve, Archie and Johnny Johnston;
- Tom (SNR) and Shirley Simon;
- Hazel Shadford.

Dr John Bradley, an anthropologist with a long association with Yanyuwa people whose description of Yanyuwa culture, connection to country and environmental management concerns comprises the major component (Part 2) of the Sea Country Plan.

li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers: Graham Friday, Thomas Simon (JNR); and Damien Pracy.

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Tableland Printing Service, Atherton, Queensland, undertook the layout and printing of the *Sea Country Plan*, including preparation of maps.

DEDICATION

Na-ja narnu-yuwa narnu-walkurra
barra, wirrimalaru, barni-wardimantha,
Barni-ngalngandaya, nakari wabarrangu
li-wankala,
li-ngambalanga kuku,
li-ngambalanga murimuri,
li-ngambalanga ngabuji,
li-ngambalanga kardirdi
kalu-kanthaninya na-ja narnu-yuwa,
jiwini awarala, anthaa yurrngumantha barra.
Nyirra-nyngkarriya! Nyirru-lingenmaya!
Yurrngumantha. Barni-ndaya winarrku!

This Law is important, it is powerful, don't break it, don't be ignorant of it, it is from the past, from the old people, our mother's mother's brothers, our father's fathers, our father's mothers and our mother's brothers, they carried this Law, this Law is in the country and the sea for all time. Listen to it! Remember it! It is for all time. Do not leave it behind as some kind of rubbish.

(Dinah Norman Marrngawi and Annie Karrakayn in Bradley et al 2005:43).



Centre Island handback celebrations, June 2007

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Aims of the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan*

We, the Yanyuwa people of the south-west Gulf of Carpentaria, have developed the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* to:

- Explain the relationship between Yanyuwa people and our Sea Country;
- Explain Yanyuwa people's concerns about current and future management of our Sea Country;
- Set out objectives, strategies and actions to address Yanyuwa concerns and aspirations about sea country management; and
- Propose options for working with government agencies, industry and other stakeholders to achieve our objectives, strategies and actions.

Sea Country Planning

The *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* is one of five pilot Sea Country Plans funded by the Australian Government's National Oceans Office (now part of the Department of the Environment and Water Resources) as a means to engage coastal Indigenous groups in marine planning under Australia's Oceans Policy¹. The other pilot Sea Country Plans are:

- *Thuwanthu / Bujimulla Sea Country Plan* (south-east Gulf of Carpentaria);
- *Dhimurru Sea Country Plan* (north-east Arnhemland);
- *Kooyang Sea Country Plan* (south-west Victoria); and
- *Ngarrindjeri Sea Country Plan* (south-eastern South Australia).



The *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* draws on the outcomes of the following research and consultations processes funded by the National Oceans Office as part of their development of the Northern Regional Marine Plan:

- A review of literature about Aboriginal rights, use, management and interests in northern Australian marine environments, published in 2004²;
- Consultations undertaken by the Northern Land Council in 2004;
- A report by anthropologist Dr John Bradley documenting Yanyuwa relationship with Sea Country, and our 'concerns and aspirations regarding use and management of our Sea Country';
- Consultations undertaken by planner Dr Dermot Smyth in 2006 to prepare the Implementation Strategy for the Sea Country Plan.

At the same time this *Sea Country Plan* was being developed, many Yanyuwa Traditional Owners and others expressed grave concern about the proposal to expand the existing underground McArthur River Mine into an open cut mine, a proposal that involves relocating the river course by 6km and excavating a 200 metre deep pit in the existing river bed. In addition to making efforts to stop the proposed mine expansion, because of threats to our Sea Country environments downstream, Traditional Owners developed a proposal for establishing a Marine Park around the Sir Edward Pellew Island. Information contained in the marine park submission to the

Developing the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan*

Left to right: Damien Pracy, Graham Friday, Thomas Simon (JNR), Thomas Simon (SNR recently deceased), Steve Johnston, Philip Timothy (recently deceased), Leonard Norman, Levina Norman, Barry Shadford, Hazel Shadford, Felicity Chapman.

¹www.oceans.gov.au

²National Oceans Office 2004

³Chapman 2005

Structure of the Sea Country Plan

The *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* is made up of three parts, including this Introduction (Part 1).

Part 2 (*Barni-Wardimantha Awara - Don't Spoil the Country*) presents John Bradley's report summarising the Yanyuwa cultural, environmental and economic values of our Sea Country, as well as our concerns about its management.

Part 3 (Implementation Strategy) draws on the information presented in Part 2 and from other sources to set out Yanyuwa objectives, strategies and actions for addressing key Sea Country management issues, including the building of local capacity and development of partnerships to address those issues.

Values of Yanyuwa Sea Country

Yanyuwa Sea Country has many cultural and natural values that are very significant locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. These include both natural and cultural values which, for Yanyuwa people, are inseparable. We know we must take care of the natural values (the water quality, the animals, the plants and the habitats) in order to protect our culture. And we must protect our culture (our language, our traditional practices, and our knowledge) in order to protect the natural values of our Country.

Cultural Values

The cultural values of Yanyuwa Sea Country are described in detail in Part 2.

Natural Values

The tidal areas support 26 species of mangroves and the marine and estuarine areas are home to 132 species of fish (including the Sawfish, which is a threatened species).

Dugong

The population of dugongs around the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and along the coast to the mouth of the Limmen River is estimated to be about 8,000 animals, making it the largest dugong population in the Northern Territory.

Whales and Dolphins

Yanyuwa Sea Country is home to several species of whales and dolphins, including the Black Whale, the Short-finned Pilot Whale, the Australian Snubnose Dolphin and the Indo-Pacific Dolphin.

Marine Turtles

All six species of marine turtles found in Australian waters occur in Yanyuwa Sea Country. Several marine turtle species nest on all the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, the most common being the Flatback Turtle. There are 36 significant nesting areas for Flatback Turtles and Green Turtles in Yanyuwa Sea Country.



Saltwater Crocodiles

Like other regions across the Top End of the NT, the rivers, mangrove creeks and coastal waters of Yanyuwa Sea Country support large numbers of Saltwater Crocodiles.

Wetlands: mangroves, saltmarshes and seagrass beds

The delta of the McArthur River and coastal and island waters support a nationally significant wetland comprising extensive mangroves (26 species), saltmarshes and adjacent seagrass beds. These habitats are the nursery grounds and feeding grounds of many of our culturally important species and are the life blood of the local commercial and recreational fishing industries.

Seabirds and Shorebirds

35 migratory bird species visit Yanyuwa Sea Country, of which 21 species breed on our islands and coastal lands. There are 33 recorded shorebird nesting colonies on Yanyuwa Country; the largest Crested Tern and Roseate Tern rookeries in the world are found on the Sir Edward Pellew Islands.

⁴Adapted from Jaensch, Whitehead and Chatto 1995 and Chapman 2005

PART 2: BARNI-WARDIMANTHA AWARA (DON'T SPOIL THE COUNTRY)

Saltwater Country Management: Belief, Understandings, Issues, Planning and Perceptions amongst the Yanyuwa people of the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory.

By
John J. Bradley
School of Politics and Social Enquiry and Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies
Monash University

with the Yanyuwa Traditional Owners of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and adjacent coastlands



Mandatharramba (Base Bay) Vanderlin Island Photo Parks & Wildlife Service NT

*Kanarna-bulma
Ngarna-ngurru
a-Munjimunjingu ayu
ngurrbungku*

*I stand and feel the sea wind
It refreshes my face; for too long
I have been a woman of the inland scrub
country*

(song composed by Elma Brown a-Bunubunu)

Preface

This is a report written for and on behalf of the Yanyuwa owners of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and surrounding seas and coastal environments. It is perhaps structured differently from reports of this kind and this is partly in response to the Yanyuwa people who helped put this report together.

The findings and other more philosophical issues associated with them come first in this report, because the findings represent the hope of the Yanyuwa people and are therefore powerful statements about their needs and desires for their own country. The findings however need embedding within the historical and contemporary thoughts that have created them.

Thus this report speaks to the management of an environment in which humans are equally an important part, so any understanding of the environment under consideration must encompass not only biological and physical parameters but also the variables associated with Yanyuwa cultural Law and cultural practice. Thus the way people such as the Yanyuwa perceive their environment and the Laws and practices that are embedded in this environment assumes significance.



Lawarrijila (near Sandy Head) looking to Vanderlin Island. Saline flats, mangroves and 'islets' of vegetation is also 'saltwater country'.

Summary of Findings:

This study has found that Yanyuwa attitudes and perceptions of their sea and island country differs considerably, in some regard, from those of mainstream managers, biologists, ecologists, tourists and fishermen who use the sea. At the same time, however, there are points of juncture that concern species management, economic usage and long term protection of the maritime environment. Having travelled through all of the country over a period of 25 years what is both frustrating, and in some respects not surprising to me, is the continued widespread concern for similar issues in regard to the emotion and concern for their rights that Yanyuwa people believe they have for their sea country. Many of the issues, of course, precede any discussion of land right and native title rights. They are concerns that people have because they see themselves as owners both of the sea country and kin to the many animal species that live there, as well as having strong emotional and economic ties. There are points where family groups within Yanyuwa community differ in some opinions; these are issues associated with long histories in the area that have influenced how people feel about what has happened and is still happening on their sea country. What can be generally said here about these issues is that the influences of historical association, practical experience and current land tenure situations all have effect. Ultimately, Yanyuwa attitudes are shaped by what can be loosely termed their world view, but should more correctly be termed the ontological and epistemological basis for knowing. They are inseparable from the economic and social situation that people describe when speaking of the sea and coastal environment of their home.

Many non-Yanyuwa marine managers and planners do not share many of the concerns that Yanyuwa people have for their sea country. Explanations regarding the nature of sea tenure and species relationship and management all too often are embedded within the foundations of Yanyuwa Law and culture rather than in the western scientific paradigm. This being said, however, there are points of unity and concern, though often embedded in what are perceived by the west to be "different" ways of seeing and knowing. This is an issue of fundamental importance when looking at any of the activities that take place in an environment that is enculturated with Indigenous sensibilities.

A key finding of the negotiations that have taken place, and which this report documents, is the need for improved dialogue and information flow between Yanyuwa people and non-Indigenous people who have in interest in the same environment.

Looking after the sea country

Just as with the land, Yanyuwa people see caring for the sea, islands, reefs, sandbars and sea grass beds as an integral part of living on their land. The binary opposition that the west makes between the land and sea is one that Yanyuwa people do not make, it is all country, named, known and owned and therefore to be managed and cared for. Thus the sea is not separate from the land; caring for the mainland country is seen in no different light than caring for the sea country. The Yanyuwa people, for example, consider that the sea starts some 13 kilometres inland (see also Trigger 1987). This incorporates the vast saline flats and mangrove lined creeks of the maritime environment. On extremely high tides all of this country is inundated and it is therefore sea country.

From this perspective one of the most important issues related to sea country management is ownership and access so that it can be cared for. The responsibilities that the individuals, families and clans have under their Law to look after the sea can then be carried out. Sacred sites, sea grass beds, turtle and sea bird rookeries can be looked after, and the proper relationship between people and sea can be maintained. The stories and songs for the country can be passed on to the younger generations and the sea is then looked after according to the underpinnings of a pervasive sense of Law.

Increasingly, Yanyuwa people are "taking on" western perceptions of management as well; this has been brought about by the need to find out and communicate with other people who also have an interest in their country. As a result, some western knowledge and practices are becoming incorporated into an Yanyuwa world-view. Increasing contact with government agencies, biological and ecological research endeavors and increased anger and despair of the mistreatment of their sea country have been the primary agents for this change and desire for communication. Changes in the ecology of the sea country brought about by industrial developments such as mining, or increased development in regard to tourism or primary industry such as crabbing and fishing, are forces which Yanyuwa people acknowledge are beyond their control and which need new and different, and in many instances, cooperative approaches to looking after the maritime environment.

The Yanyuwa people consulted in the course of the research expressed a variety of views about what they would like to see happening within the orbit of the sea country they call home. It is obvious that their constant and intimate relationship with the sea

country has resulted in a rich database of empirical knowledge, much of which is reflected in their concern for diminishing species and the health of other species. There is also the overriding need to look after the sea; most of the respondents were firm in their belief that they had the knowledge and ability to look after their country in the way of their own Law, but were also mindful that community based ranger programs are also necessary and vital components of contemporary management proposals.

Yanyuwa owners of sea country are also aware that there are coastal and sea management issues to which their own Law has difficulties. In this respect, many of the respondents expressed the need to have access to information about these issues and to find a balance between their Law and other methods that are needed to care for the sea country and its human and non-human inhabitants today.

Understanding Damage to Sea Country

Yanyuwa owners of sea and coastal country are increasingly appalled by both habitat and species degradation. Dumping of uneconomic fish species and fish frames, deaths of dugong and marine turtles, sea grass bed and reef damage, intrusion into sacred places and disturbance of important cultural material all have profound effects up people's emotional well being. Yanyuwa people see all of these events differently to non-Indigenous people. In terms of Yanyuwa epistemology or Law, the sea and coastal environment is an enlivened one, animated by the actions of Ancestral beings, the actions of Yanyuwa ancestors and the movement of contemporary kin. Therefore, any damage to species and sea country moves beyond just what is observable; it enters into a realm of discussion about responsibilities, Law and an overriding concern for the maintenance of good emotional relationships between people and their country. Thus, such issues as damage and death as observed on sea country need to be articulated in an understanding that Indigenous people can have an effect on sea country only to the extent that they can emotionally engage with it.

Any account of trying to understand Yanyuwa perceptions of damage to the sea country must move beyond specifying merely good or bad ecological processes and examine the subjective and emotional interactions with the concrete and (in our "scientific" observer terms) the "imagined" phenomena. This subjectivity is a critical point of attempting to understand Yanyuwa responses to damage. It is a point that needs further engagement because much of the inadequacy of non-Indigenous responses to Yanyuwa concerns is that it deals with the practical and mundane at the expense of what can be,

somewhat very carefully termed, the mystical and sacred. In many instances, issues of degradation caused by non-Indigenous people violate a system of management that is dependant on understandings of negotiation and relatedness, which are part of an ecology of internal relations where no event occurs which stands alone from others. The stench from rotting dugong, killed in fishing nets, or the smell of decaying fish carcasses, permeates the country and offends an unseen world of living human ancestors and powerful Ancestral beings that may in response cause "trouble" for their living kin.

Such events cause angst and debate amongst the living people who are owners of the sea country or kin to the dugong and other species. Hence, there is a synthesis of relationships tied to other events, whereby no event occurs which is not ultimately related to many others. In a Yanyuwa epistemology there is a living ecological system that requires balance if it is to be sustained in a correct, appropriate and moral way. If this system experiences too many imbalances it will begin to generate its own limiting factors as a side effect of these increasing imbalances. The intimate nature of "degradation", issues which concern Indigenous people, is not well understood by the broader society.

It is in relation to these imbalances in their country that Yanyuwa people feel most perplexed and frustrated; there is a sense that there is an inability to respond, to take appropriate action, because the issues are new and bigger than any of their ancestors could ever have imagined. As a general rule most Yanyuwa people are not well informed about organizations and institutions that deal with coastal and sea management issues and some of the organizations are seen as inappropriate for Yanyuwa needs.

Yanyuwa people feel an urgent need to access information that is appropriate and inclusive of their concerns and relevant to the current problems, as they perceive them. There have, to date, been few opportunities for Yanyuwa people to access this sort of information. One of the main ways that respondents identified as being of help to them in these issues is to get information about sea and coastal management through exposure to the practices and attitudes of other Aboriginal groups such as Dhimurru in Northeast Arnhem Land, and other avenues where the provision of new information can be demonstrated through projects, visits to other coastal communities and workshops and meetings in coastal communities and sea based homeland centres.

Fishing and Crabbing

While many Yanyuwa people are critical of commercial fishing and crabbing interests, the situation is somewhat more complex in that many Yanyuwa men have been employed as labourers for at least the last three decades, and as such they know the mechanics of the industry; thus there is discussion about whether or not Yanyuwa families should engage in the industry. However, their double bind is that these same men have seen first hand the issues that generate from such activities and how they impact upon their sea country.

One of the main reasons some Yanyuwa families might want to be involved in fishing and crabbing ventures is that they know the country; it is often their own country, or country they can relate to through kin networks, and they can identify strongly with the lifestyle. In coastal communities, association with fishing and crabbing projects is seen to be taking control of their own resources so that they can be managed more fairly and it removes unknown people from their land. There is also a sense whereby if money is to be made from country it should be the Yanyuwa owners doing it and not people who have no personal relationship to the sea and coastal country.

It is, however, difficult to grasp the level of support across the Yanyuwa community for such projects. There are those who see it as a continuation of the things they don't like non-indigenous people doing. Those people who want to be involved are usually very positive about the benefits that can be accrued. Some people are also critical of large portions of funding going into one project; further complication is that people outside of the project can be reluctant to be involved if they are not traditional owners of the country where the project will be based.

Other people from within the community criticise such projects because of the relationship these endeavors often have to an increase in substance abuse, and control by particular individuals and families which will lead to a break down in kin obligations. Conversely, many people see it as positive because the fishing and crabbing projects are a focus on work and skill enhancement. The members of the families involved in these often mention these positive effects. Some families also fear that even if Yanyuwa people control the projects it will still lead to species decline and degradation. This is particularly in relation to important species that represent critical Ancestral beings and economic target species such as crabs, and to important places

on the sea and coastal country. Combined with this is a concern that many of the people working on such projects are younger men who may not be aware of the important sacred places and may inadvertently fish there. There are also increasingly more intimate problems, whereby some of the "crabbers" are marrying into Indigenous families and using these relationships to sustain their rights to crab over certain areas of sea and creeks. Such issues cannot be dealt with easily and there is much angst and concern amongst Yanyuwa families about these issues as well.

In many situations there are unrealistic expectations of the benefits that might be gained from setting up fishing and crabbing projects under Yanyuwa control. There also appears to be a lack of knowledge about the responsibilities and requirements of people involved in these projects. There tends to be a generally poor understanding of legal liabilities, financial and management skills and health requirements. While many of the Yanyuwa people who have been involved with these projects can emphasise their physical skill in tasks such as boat handling and net and pot work, there is a lack of desire to take on further tasks that require additional technical expertise.

Such discussions also relate to a long history of inappropriate projects often being imposed on communities and a lack of understanding of the bureaucratic requirements of funding agencies. Thus, very few Yanyuwa people have a clear idea of where they fit into a picture which is clouded with a myriad number of government departments, each of which has its own area of responsibility, and may be represented by a different face with a different name each time it needs to send a representative to the community. Many of these projects are also managed from an outside regime and, as a result, opportunities to manage projects for themselves, to learn from their own failures and be accountable for their own actions has been limited.

Tourism

Of all of the issues that relate to the sea country it is the issue of tourists that cause much of the passionate debate. Yanyuwa respondents have given a complex and diverse range of responses to tourism. While there is debate, there has been over the last two decades, a general shift in attitudes towards tourism, with an increasing discussion that accepts that some limited form of tourism on their country may work. There is also an increasing interest in becoming involved with tourism ventures, albeit with little awareness of what such involvement might realistically entail. And the history of some tourist projects in these areas demonstrates the unscrupulous, non-Indigenous "middle men" maintain the control.

The presence of tourists on country is usually seen as a threat that needs to be controlled. There are many places on the sea, reefs and islands that people should not go and unless such places can be safeguarded there is not likely to be a widespread support for tourist development. It should also be noted that sometimes there are also lone dissenters from this general prevailing attitude towards tourists and this causes internal unrest and conflict in communities.

Tourists are generally seen as ignorant people who need to be educated and taught to know about Yanyuwa Law, ignorant of the very important places and the species that inhabit the marine environment. As a consequence such people need to be controlled, kept to particular areas and shown country only in the presence of the appropriate people who can guide them properly.

A central feature of any discussion about tourism is the homeland centre movement. Tourism is often not welcomed by most homeland residents because a primary motivation for setting up a homeland centre is to limit contact with others, thereby fostering a more healthy focus on kin and country. For this reason many homeland centres are often associated with nearby sacred and significant sites associated with an Ancestral being that gives the homeland centre its distinct identity. As with all cases, however, there are exceptions to this and as long as important places maintain their sanctity there is discussion of having tourists live on or nearby to homeland centres. In either event the issue is always control.

The establishment of any tourist proposal by Yanyuwa people is fraught with difficulties. There are many skills required to run small business operations such as tourism. Few Yanyuwa people in the area under discussion have the skill and often rely or talk of relying on non-Indigenous people to assist them; this is a prime site for conflict. It is also difficult for people to gain access to the training and experience needed to develop the necessary skills. Tourism on sea and coastal communities has the added issues of weather, tides, boats, adequate shelter and freshwater supplies.

However, there are some families who are running small scale tourist enterprises. The difference here is that the people who come and stay are known by the families and thus a part of a tourist process that is inclusive of a process of mutual obligation and respect. Tourism is a part of much bigger and ongoing discussions that are central to many Yanyuwa families trying to discuss ways in which they may benefit from the large non-Indigenous presence over their country.

Conservation, Management and Biodiversity

Western notions of conservation and management, and terms like "bio-diversity", are not that well understood by the Yanyuwa people. This is an important point because the very things that the respondents are hoping to do with their marine and coastal country incorporate all of the above understandings and provide an important point of juncture with Western scientific and management system. The issue is rather one of how knowledge fits into Yanyuwa frameworks. Yanyuwa ways of knowing relate to what non-Indigenous people call the natural world through a lens of understanding that includes the actions of the Ancestral beings, Law and kinship, which are all part of one whole; thus the separate terminologies used by government environmental managers and scientists are seen to tear at the fabric of this epistemological underpinning.

The non-Indigenous concepts of conservation, management and biodiversity involve active intervention in the natural world to attempt either to control the process and events happening there, or to further understand the species involved. Thus, while Yanyuwa people may not, on the surface, dispute issues of sea turtle tagging and dugong satellite mapping, it would be wrong to presume that such activities are seen and interpreted in the way that scientists would. Other species such as octopus, whales and dolphins, because of their ontological and epistemological basis, are even more problematic in terms of understandings of Western research. I make reference to the discussion on damage made above particularly with regard to the interrelationship of all species to other events. Western views differ from this because they rely on the premise that relationships and interactions occurring in the natural world can be understood and thus managed.

Yanyuwa "management" of the sea country is also understood through song and ritual. It is seen as an integrated process, whereby knowledge of the natural world is also gathered through personal experience and then passed on through the pathways of oral tradition and kinship networks. The behavior of natural species and even environmental phenomena are also attributed to the fact that all things have Law; for example, the biological behavior of a dugong is an expression of its Law.

Because of the way Yanyuwa people situate themselves within the environment there is no concept of having dominion over it; this is one of the tensions that Yanyuwa people feel when they begin to discuss issues of development over their own

country. Yanyuwa relationships to the land are defined in terms of family, Law, culture, sacred places, the old people, usage of the sea and the harvesting of natural resources. To be accepted and understood by Yanyuwa people, conservation practices that carry explicit and implicit values in a Western way of knowing must be framed in ways that are consistent with Yanyuwa values.

Consequently, an essential component of considering Yanyuwa involvement in marine and coastal conservation management techniques on the sea and coastal areas is recognition of the important values possessed by Yanyuwa owners in relation to owning, controlling and managing their sea country.

It is obvious from discussing these issues with Yanyuwa men, women and children that they are willing to identify many management, species and nature conservation issues, but, because of the differences in perception regarding the motives of conservation management agencies, it remains obscure as to how non-Indigenous people can assist in addressing Yanyuwa concerns. An example of this confusion is to be seen in any discussion about dugong and marine turtle management. Many Yanyuwa people resent being always seen as the problem in relation to species decline. Their own empirical knowledge tells them that there are also issues of weather, professional fishing and crabbing, tourism and even mining ventures. There are also other explanations that Yanyuwa people give for why species are in decline. One of the main reasons given is that the old people who once held the Law for that species have passed away. People, who through the forces of history, have been alienated from their sea country are said not have been able to care for them through practices set down in their Law. This is also related to issues where the coming of non-Indigenous people has changed the strong ties between people and sea country and the balance between people and their country has changed.

Feral Animals

No one person's knowledge about country remains in a state of stasis, and people see and discuss changes that occur to the sea country on a daily basis. Due to an increase in information dissemination, people are aware of more environmental issues than would have previously been the case. Some of the respondents spoke with concern about bilge water from foreign ships bringing with them exotic species from overseas and are aware of the impact they may have if they were to enter into Yanyuwa Sea Country. Again, these are junctures where Yanyuwa people and non-indigenous agencies can find a common point of concern.

More problematic in this discussion is the notion of feral terrestrial animals. This is an important discussion because islands are seen as a part of sea country. While non-Indigenous people often regard feral animals as pests, Yanyuwa people view them differently. Through long associations with these species they are often seen to belong on the country as much as native species, and in many instances the introduced species have taken on important roles in Yanyuwa life.

Where feral animals are in large numbers and damage the country Yanyuwa people may recognize the impact, but do not generally connect such issues with a need to carry out other forms of management. Generally Indigenous people do not understand the rationale for feral animals control programs. The effect of feral animals, such as goats, dogs, cats and pigs on island country are not seen as a cause for concern. It is seen as a natural phenomena that animals eat plants, drink water, raise dust and eat some native species. To separate the impact of feral animals from native species on these grounds is not seen as logical. Feral animals, as with other living species, are brought into an environmental perspective which sees all living things on country as an integrated whole.

In many areas feral animals are looked upon as a resource of the country. Their presence on country confirms that the land is productive, they are often taken as a food source, and in emotional terms people derive pleasure from seeing them on country because they are often related to issues of family history and labour experience; on Yanyuwa country this would include the goat, cattle and horse populations on West Island and Vanderlin Island in particular.

Generally, however, Yanyuwa people appear happy to support programs for harvesting feral animals and to receive benefits that these programs provide as long as specific attention is paid to who are the correct land owners involved. Control programs that are aimed at reducing numbers or eradicating local populations without making use of the animals are not generally supported. People are offended by, and find objectionable, the shooting of animals for waste. Usually in this instance the carcasses are left to rot on the country and the smell of decaying animals is seen to be an offense to the country and its inhabitants.

Mining

Yanyuwa people have a range of attitudes towards mining. Some people support mining on country because of the financial rewards they can accrue. Others are against mining because of the disruption they see it causing to their country and the species

that inhabit it, as well as the tension that issues of any royalties and other financial rewards may bring into the communities. A growing part of these concerns in recent times is the perceived gender bias which has occurred during consultation in regard to general issues of permission and royalty distribution.

While at one level there is a general level of acceptance of the mine and certain powerlessness that Indigenous people have to stop them, Yanyuwa people still equate issues of mining with danger. This danger is associated with the impact that mining-related issues are seen to have on country, the creatures that live on land and sea, on sacred sites and issues of Law more generally. There is a tension created whereby many Yanyuwa people perceive this danger in terms of the people themselves who carry out the mining and to Indigenous people who should be looking after the land, and in some cases, this concern extends into a more general concern for the rest of the society and the human and non-human beings that live in it.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Land Councils, other representative Indigenous bodies and State, Territory and Federal Government agencies:

1. Seek more detailed knowledge on the aspirations of Yanyuwa sea country owners, taking into full regard issues of ownership and management as understood by their own Law.
2. Address the immediate information needs of owners of coastal and sea country, noting that from the respondents' views there are many identifiable needs but some of which appear to take precedence.
3. Promote the recognition of Yanyuwa people's rights as owners of coastal and sea country and as people who have consistently practiced and continue to practice systems of Law to manage and protect the sea and its resources.
4. Put in place systems whereby there is increased Yanyuwa engagement, if not control, over directions and outcomes of environmental research on sea and island country. Such a process would then facilitate the involvement of Yanyuwa people in conservation research that will be of benefit to Indigenous people.
5. Where this research also acknowledges and uses Yanyuwa knowledge, develop provisions to protect and understand the Yanyuwa rights of ownership of this knowledge.

6. Develop and install appropriate signs used in the whole area under discussion that are educative rather than prohibitive. Such signs should educate people about the value of dugong and sea turtle populations and also the cultural significance of some of the areas around the river systems, sea and islands. In relation to education there also needs to be books and pamphlets developed that explain the Yanyuwa significance of the areas.

7. Recognise that in a community such as Borroloola, due to the tragic loss of senior men, women have become increasingly pivotal in regard to daily management concerns for their coastal and maritime country. Hence, forums must be developed where women can also be consulted and given opportunities to express their concerns for their country.

8. Develop a structured statement of environmental and sea and coastal management policies based on considerations important to Yanyuwa people. Issues of ownership and access, protection of important sites and the development of cultural awareness.

9. Support the li-Anthawirriyarra ranger program so that it will foster and maintain social control and practices of management practices that can work with Yanyuwa Law.

10. Develop procedures where formal recognition is given to the role of Yanyuwa sea and coastal management in contemporary sea country management. Such recognition should not be dependent of formal Land Rights procedures, but where these do exist the Western law surrounding such grants of land should be respected and adhered to.

11. Recognising that, because of Yanyuwa Law and their own Indigenous land management methods, there is no sense of a generic group of Yanyuwa people who care for all the sea country, and the understandings of ownership and Law specific to context and place. There should also be additional research programs developed that are aware of each family/clan group's concerns. Such an undertaking would promote culturally appropriate planning processes, and the sustainable use of contemporary sea and coastal uses, including resource use around coastal outstations, living areas and the associated riparian environments.

12. Provide opportunities where Yanyuwa owners of coastal and sea country have access to scientific knowledge in ways that do not contest their own Law knowledge and which will provide practical and non-threatening ways for them to make decisions about sea and coastal management.

13. Note should be made that issues of primary concern to non-Indigenous managers of sea country may not be recognised as issues that are important to Yanyuwa owners of sea country.

14. The li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers, in consultation with various Yanyuwa families, should be engaged in youth education and visitation to sea country.



Munkumungkarnda (Ataluma Point) Centre Island.
The ground oven where the Two Initiates cooked flying fox.

<i>Nyimbala-nyngkarriya!</i>	<i>You two Listen!</i>
<i>Nguthundakarilu</i>	<i>to the north</i>
<i>Janda-ramanji</i>	<i>The waves strike the rocks</i>
<i>Wayka akarriya</i>	<i>rolling in from the east</i>
<i>Munkumungkarnda</i>	<i>at Munkumungkarnda</i>

(song composed by Short Friday Babawurra)

Introduction

The Report

This report presents information on Yanyuwa perceptions of their sea and coastal country. It discusses issues that range from identity and maintenance of Law to issues of concern concerning habitat and species survival and relationships between Yanyuwa and other stakeholders.

The restatement of the Yanyuwa people's primary concerns presented in this report were collected over a period of two weeks, but is also based on fieldwork in the region over a 25 year period and presents the views of Yanyuwa people that have the sea and coast as important and vital parts of their country. Gathering and presenting information has tried to avoid the gender bias towards male views that is quite often the case in many such negotiations; women too are owners of sea country and they regularly move through it, and in a community such as Borroloola senior women now exercise much daily control over issues of Law and the saltwater country.

The respondents include people who are traditional owners of the country, and people who are related to the country under question by other forms of kinship reckoning. The report also contains the opinions of people who are living on or near their sea country, and the opinions of people who, for a number of reasons, identify with being sea people but cannot or choose not to live on their country. The opinions expressed about sea country issues as expressed in this report come from a wide range of personal perspectives and clearly then, cannot be expected to be all concordant over the wide ranging issues that were discussed. They do, however, demonstrate that all Yanyuwa people share common concerns over a large number of issues. The report also gives valuable insights into Yanyuwa "world views" and the level and diversity of understanding from which efforts to reconcile Yanyuwa and non-indigenous attitudes must be made.

It is dangerous therefore to draw too many generic conclusions. This report contains information which is specific to the Yanyuwa language and cultural group; thus, while there are similarities in understandings, care should be taken when extrapolating knowledge from this report to provide evidence for another group or region. It is also important not to read specific cultural information as a static set of cultural behaviors that existed before the European colonization of Australia. Such assumptions are ill founded. Instead, it should be taken for granted that Indigenous communities such

as the Yanyuwa, were, and are, in continuous states of change throughout their histories.

Limitations

The information presented in this report must be understood within a particular context. It is information that has been collected and interpreted largely by a non-indigenous person. It is important to recognise the limitations that this places on the material presented.

Firstly, as the compiler and a researcher with an anthropological background in Indigenous land, ritual and kinship issues and a strong interest in cross-cultural communication in the management of land and species, I bring to this work a particular view that may influence the information collected. In my favour I have travelled to, and worked with families and individuals from the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola for over two decades and am a proficient speaker of Yanyuwa and its associated dialects as well as Kriol.

By its very nature this report risks imposing definitions on Yanyuwa people; therefore it is important that the information presented here should not be used in a prescriptive manner. Rather, the information in this report should be seen as indicative of attitudes and perceptions and to demonstrate the need to develop effective and ongoing consultation and negotiation procedures. At the same time the information presented here should provide a more substantive basis for the development of these procedures.

The report should also not be used to identify people's attitudes to particular issues and proposals or as a basis for redefining development proposals to circumvent the consultation process. This is a critical point and the Yanyuwa community is at a point in their discussions in relation to proposed and actual development where wrongful use of the data presented here could do more harm than good.

The information on which this report is based cannot be used to draw quantitative conclusions about the levels of Yanyuwa support for any particular aspirations and perceptions expressed. Where an opinion or attitude is widely recorded it should not, without further more careful fine-grained fieldwork, be taken as the opinion of all Yanyuwa people.

Many of the issues discussed in this report are abstract and present special difficulties for cross-cultural communication. It should not be taken for

granted that just because some of the respondents gave their information in English that their framework for referencing such issues is a Western epistemological approach. The information presented here may give insight into how ideas and understandings of marine and coastal management have filtered across the cultural boundaries, which have had the most impact, which have had little, and which issues are still of prime importance, despite the difficulties in translating ill defined ideas and concepts.

The Area Under Discussion

The Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands are located in the south west corner of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. The nearest township is Borroloola some 60 kilometres inland from the coast and nearly 1000 kilometres south east of Darwin.

Baker (1989) notes that the shallow nature of the sea in this area of the Gulf, the shape of the islands, and the complex maze of creeks and channels which make up the mouths of the rivers entering the Gulf, all produce a great length of coastline for quite a small amount of land. The large area of shallow water and long coastline has enabled people such as the Yanyuwa to develop an economy and traditions which focus heavily on the marine and nearby terrestrial resources.

The islands which comprise the archipelago of the Sir Edward Pellew Group span out to the north and north east across the mouths of the McArthur River, Wearyan River and the Carrington Channel. These islands range in size from approximately 264 square kilometers (Vanderlin Island) down to isolated rocks of a few square metres. Arnol (1983) estimates that the group consists of eight large islands, more than fifty small sand islets and approximately twenty reefs.

The main islands in the Sir Edward Pellew Group are West Island, South West Island, Black and White Graggy Islands, Centre Island, Skull Island, Watson Island, North Island and Vanderlin Island. The islands are generally of low relief with the coastline of the islands varying from rocky cliffs of sandstone to tidal mudflats with mangrove fringes, sweeping beaches of coral, white sand and shell grit to small sandy coves. Sand dunes have been formed on the eastern shore of the islands where currents, wind and wave-driven sand have accumulated against the rocky shore lines and headlands.

All of the larger islands of the Pellew Group have ridges of dissected sandstone outcrops with steep slopes which run down into the valleys, which are level and consist almost entirely of sand and salt

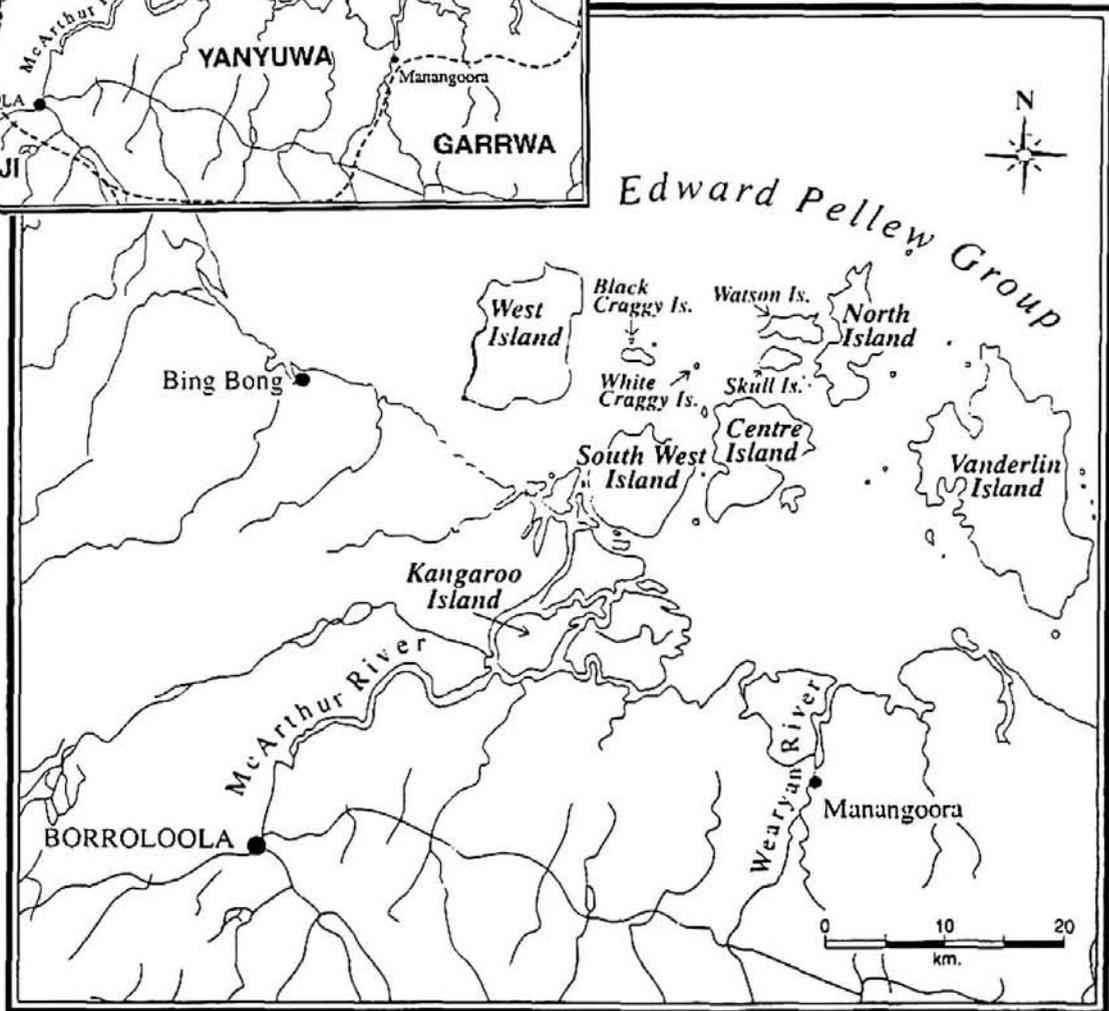
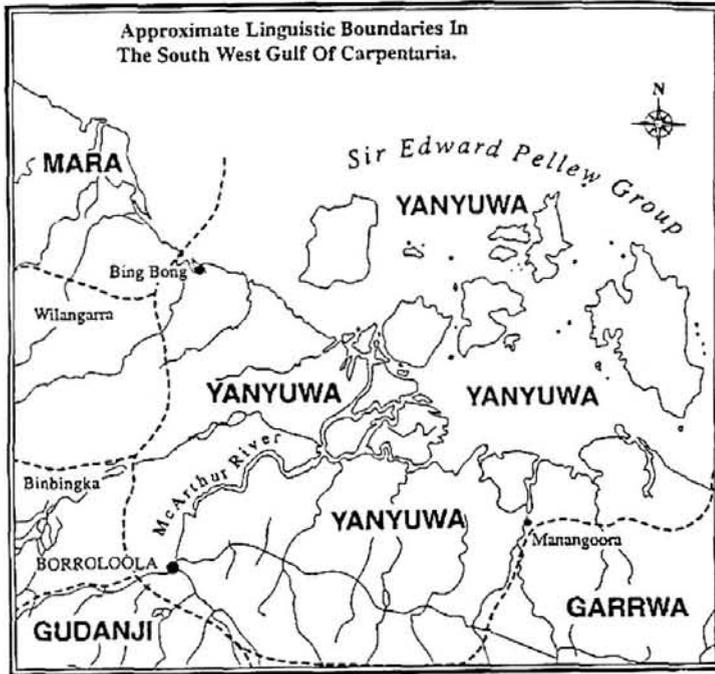
pans. In the wet season these valleys are either swamps or lagoons, however by the end of the dry season, the majority have evaporated. Vanderlin Island has a large permanent freshwater lake, **Walala** (Lake Eames), and many of the islands also have permanent springs or soaks which when excavated provide freshwater. These springs and soaks are located where the valleys funnel the water into low depressions on the valley floors.

The dominant habitats on the islands are open eucalypt woodland, stunted monsoon forest, sandstone heath, salt marsh, dune communities, freshwater wetlands on Vanderlin Island, mangrove communities and sea grass meadows. The sea grass meadows surround the southerly coastal regions of the islands and there are isolated pockets of sea grass within certain bays on the islands, particularly Vanderlin and Centre Island. The sea grass meadows are a very important aspect of the total maritime ecology. This is especially the case in relation to a Yanyuwa perception of this environment.



Looking west from *Wirnbila*, (Barbara Cove)
Vanderlin Island

South West Gulf of Carpentaria, Borroloola and the Sir Edward Pellew Islands



South West Island is the island closest to the mainland and is separated from it by a very narrow saltwater channel. It backs onto extensive mangrove forests which dominate the delta region of the McArthur River, Carrington Channel and Wearyan River. These mangrove forests are interspersed with salt marshes and mud flats. Behind the mangroves are found extensive tidal flats, samphire grasslands which graduate into land dominated by savannah grasslands, paperbark marshlands, riverine and lagoon paperbark forests which give way to mixed woodland, and open eucalypt forests.

The river systems flowing through this country are all tidal. For most of the year they are salty, or further upstream brackish, and during the floods of the wet season may be running with fresh water, at times to the river mouths and out to sea .

As mentioned above it is the sea more than any other geographical feature which the Yanyuwa use to describe their existence and their identity. The most common of these terms is **li-Anthawirriyarra**, 'the people of the sea', another term is **li-Karinguthundangu** or 'those people from the north', which is a short hand reference to the sea and islands, another term is **li-Arnindawangu**, meaning 'those people from the coastal country'. Even young people who may not have had a close relationship with the coast, or who may not speak Yanyuwa, will still describe themselves as saltwater people.

The sea as with nearly all other geographical features and phenomena in Yanyuwa country is an Ancestral being. The sea which is masculine belongs to the **Rrumburriya** clan, while the waves are feminine and also associated with the **Rrumburriya** clan. Both the spiritual essence and power of the sea and waves are located at **Muluwa** or Cape Vanderlin.

The huge sand dunes located at this area are metamorphosed waves associated with a Sea Snake Ancestral being (**a-Wirninibirniny**). The waves, **a-rumu**, which the snake creates are feminine, as are the crests of the waves, **nanda-wuku** her back, or the white foaming tops of waves **nanda-rayal** her spit or the fine mist from the waves **nanda-minymi** her condensation. The sea snake is described as **rrankunganji rru-rumungku** or 'she that is kin to the waves'.

Similarly, many of the currents found around the islands are associated with the powers of the various Ancestral beings. The tidal currents are generally called **wayikuku**, while the term **arrayalya** is applied to a point where two tidal streams come together. The presence of two currents coming together is often evidenced by the existence of flows of tidal debris called **janjilkirri**. The tidal patterns in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew islands are complex, a factor which the Yanyuwa understand well. Simply explained, within the area of the islands and the McArthur River, two high and two low tides may occur each 24 hours. The pattern is such that there is usually an extreme high water followed by an extreme lower low water, then a moderate high water followed by a moderate low water. In Yanyuwa a low tide is called **mangkuru** or **ngaruwa**, while the high tide is called **ngakan**. The second lesser high tide in the tidal sequence is known a **ralundu** and is described as **mirndilngundayarra** or 'giving calmness to the sea'. A turning tide is called **jalababa**, while the neap tide is called **wurrumu**. The currents and eddies associated with tidal movements are described using the verb **rrantharra** which means 'pulling or dragging'.



Manankurra (Manangoora) on the Wearyan River, which flows into the sea 12 km downstream. On the horizon can be seen Centre Island and South West Island.



Muluwa (Cape Vanderlin)

The sand dunes are the metamorphosed body of the Wave and Sea Ancestral being.

The Sea Country

“Let me tell you something, the sea, the saltwater, the waves, they are my mother, the sea is my mother, it is her Ancestral being. I know this, I have known this since I was small. Further I will tell you the sea has names, many names, names for the reefs, names for the sea grass beds, names for the sand bars and the sea has boundaries, we know these boundaries, they did not come here recently. From the time of the Spirit Ancestors and our human ancestors they have been there. Our songs and ceremony are also in sea, they are running through the sea both along the bottom of the sea and they also rise and travel on the surface of the sea. White people think the sea is empty that it has no Law, but the Law and the ceremony is there in the salt water, in the fish, in the sea birds, the dugong and the turtle, it is there and we knowledgeable people are holding it.”

(Dinah Norman Marrngawi)

Introduction

On the 3rd of June 1992 the High Court of Australia ruled that Indigenous title to land be recognised, thus throwing out forever the legal fiction that Australia in 1788 was *Terra Nullius*, an empty land. The above quote also reminds us that the sea has never been empty either; along with *Terra Nullius* another legal fiction, that of *Marae Nullius*, an empty sea, should also have been done away with. The Indigenous people of the Northern Territory coastline such as the Yanyuwa proclaim themselves proudly as 'Saltwater people', not bush or scrub people, not mainland people, they are a people who know and demonstrate on a daily basis what it is the sea does for them. Perhaps one of the most evocative recent books on this relationship is *Saltwater people; The Waves of Memory* (2002) by Nonie Sharp. She comments:

The Indigenous peoples of these areas are themselves rich and diverse. In their world, threads of association join people with the sea as well as the land, imprinting hem as sea peoples. They believe their ancestor spirit beings and Heroes of the sea endowed their clans with rights to particular reefs, seabed, sites and waters, also conferring a special responsibility to care for them. (Sharp 2002:xiii)

While people such as the Yanyuwa have under the *Land Rights (NT) Act 1976* claimed and won land that is a part of their ancestral homeland, namely the Borroloola Common, Sir Edward Pellew Islands and the sea grass beds from the Robinson River Mouth to Bing Bong, the issue of rights to sea is still heavily contested and, seen by many resource managers and government agencies, as problematic. That something as fluid as the sea can have Law and be classed as country and home, that can be managed and is linked to people via dense connections of human and non-human kinship, is too hard to grasp. The following section outlines how images of the self and identity can be derived from the sea.

What's in the books? A General Overview of Research and Indigenous relationships to the marine environment in the Northern Territory.

It is surprising given the respondents' views about their concern for the sea and coastal country that early anthropological research appeared to sit on the beaches and look inland. Given that the coastline of Australia was among one of the most densely populated areas of the continent, there was no systematic and detailed documentation of the religious or economic value of the sea. Researchers such as Tindale (1925-26), Warner (1937), Rose

(1960), Berndt (1964; 1970;1976), Hiatt (1965), Turner (1974), Meehan (1982), Avery (1985) and Williams (1986) all worked with coastal people who had economic, religious and economic relationships with the sea, yet none of these researchers make detailed discussion of the kinds of rights that are embedded in the sea. The first references to there being "estates" in the sea appears to be by Mr Justice Woodward in his 1973 report on page 33, while the first, albeit brief, published anthropological writing specifically on sea ownership was in response to the inquiry by the *Joint Select Committee on Aboriginal Land Rights in the Northern Territory* in 1977. Howard Morphy (1977) made submissions to this inquiry explicitly dealing with "estates" in the sea. Athol Chase (1908; 1981), writing about east coast of Cape York Peninsula, appears have provided the first substantive anthropological analysis of Indigenous sea ownership, prior to the advent of, and stimulus provided by, any land rights legislation. Chase's work was in Queensland; in the Northern Territory early work was undertaken by Keen (1980), Davis (1982;1984), Palmer (1983) and Palmer and Brady (1984), all of this research however arose out the Northern Territory legislation. More recently additional research on the notion of sea rights has been undertaken by Davis and Prescott (1992) and Peterson and Devitt (1997) and Bradley (1997,1998, 2001 and 2003). The Doctoral research undertaken by Tamisari (1995) also provides an excellent account of the importance of the sea in relation to species, kinship, ritual and sea tenure. While there is a growing body of literature on marine tenure, the issues of Indigenous relationships with different marine species, and their emotional connection with sea space has gone largely unrecorded. Even the big species of the sea, the dugong and sea turtle, have gone largely unexplored and yet continual voices of concern from Indigenous people over the last two decades and numerous examples of art and other objects indicates that these species are highly important, not just as food, but also as Ancestral beings. While research on the Indigenous relationship with this species has been well explored in Queensland and the Torres Strait (Thomson 1934, Bird and Bird 1977; Chase 1979; Johannes and MacFarlane 1991; Neitschman 1985; Smith 1988). What becomes obvious in reading this collection of texts is that people have been more concerned with economic relationships to the sea, and yet increasingly it is being understood the people have ancestral, historical and very strong emotive links to the marine environment. Probably the most important text to come out in comparatively recent times is the text *Customary Marine Tenure in Australia* (1998) edited by Peterson and Rigsby.

In relation to Borrooloola and south west Gulf of Carpentaria specific research, there is early work by the ethnographers Spencer and Gillen (1904). Avery (1985) undertook the first in depth study of the Yanyuwa people when he looked at the history of these people and their relationship to the islands; he also explored the kinship issues involved in initiation ceremonies. He also wrote the first land claim book for this region (1977) that explores relationships with the islands. Baker (1999) explored in depth Yanyuwa environmental-human relationships, with specific emphasis on the coastal country and then explored the social factors involved with people coming inland from the coast to live at Borrooloola. Bradley (1997) has explored the relationship of Yanyuwa people to their maritime environment with particular emphasis in dugong and sea turtle knowledge; he has also explored issues of ethno-management of this environment (1997, 2001) and has been involved with a large scale cultural mapping project over the islands and coastal environment (2003). Bradley has also written two land claim books for this area, the first in 1992 detailed knowledge of the islands and coastal country and the second had particular reference to the intertidal zone and sea grass beds (2000). Kumarage (2002) provides detailed evidence of Yanyuwa-Garrwa relationships with the sea and coastal country between the Robinson River mouth and Queensland border.

What is apparent from the research that has been undertaken is that there is a realization that there is a Law of the sea. It is a notion of Law that is as pervasive as that found on the mainland and forms networks and links between communities and it is these issues that will be addressed below.

YIJAN - The Dreaming? Or Images of Relatedness

The Yanyuwa people, use the terms Yijan or Dreaming to refer to the relationships between people and their environment and the Law (*narnu-yuwa*) which sets out the realm of Yanyuwa experience. It is the Law which embodies their beliefs, and the law is said to be derived from "the Dreamtime" or "the Dreaming". The term is misleading because it carries connotations of an imaginary or unreal time. Despite its popular currency amongst both Indigenous people such as the Yanyuwa and non-indigenous people the term Dreaming and Dreaming time carry a series of ideological and political connotations stemming from colonial discourses of conquest dispossession, issues discussed and highlighted by Wolfe (1991).

While people such as the Yanyuwa people continue to use the word Dreaming it is important, while needs

mean we keep the word, to move beyond the word and explore what is really meant by the term. In a more detailed rendering the Dreaming and its Law refer to a body of moral, jural and social rules and correct practices which are believed to derive from the cosmogonic actions by which ancestral beings with the ability of changing from animal and phenomenal forms into human-shaped and named the land, sea and waterways transforming parts of their bodies into landscape features, natural phenomena and plants. Along their journeys they also gave life to people at particular places, bestowed these places upon them and taught each group the correct manner of doing things: from hunting and foraging, processing of food, and the making of tools to the performance of paintings, songs and dances. These actions thus constitute the knowledge associated with a place, a knowledge that is respected and observed by being followed in everyday practices as well as re-enacted in ritual.

The life world of the Yanyuwa people is replete with images of relatedness which are used in many idiomatic expressions; the sea is used as a powerful symbol for establishing identity and notions of strength and in some instances of separateness from the mainland. The Yanyuwa people call themselves *li-Anthawirriyarra*, a term often glossed as 'the people of the sea', but the real meaning of the term is 'a people whose spiritual origins are derived from the sea'.

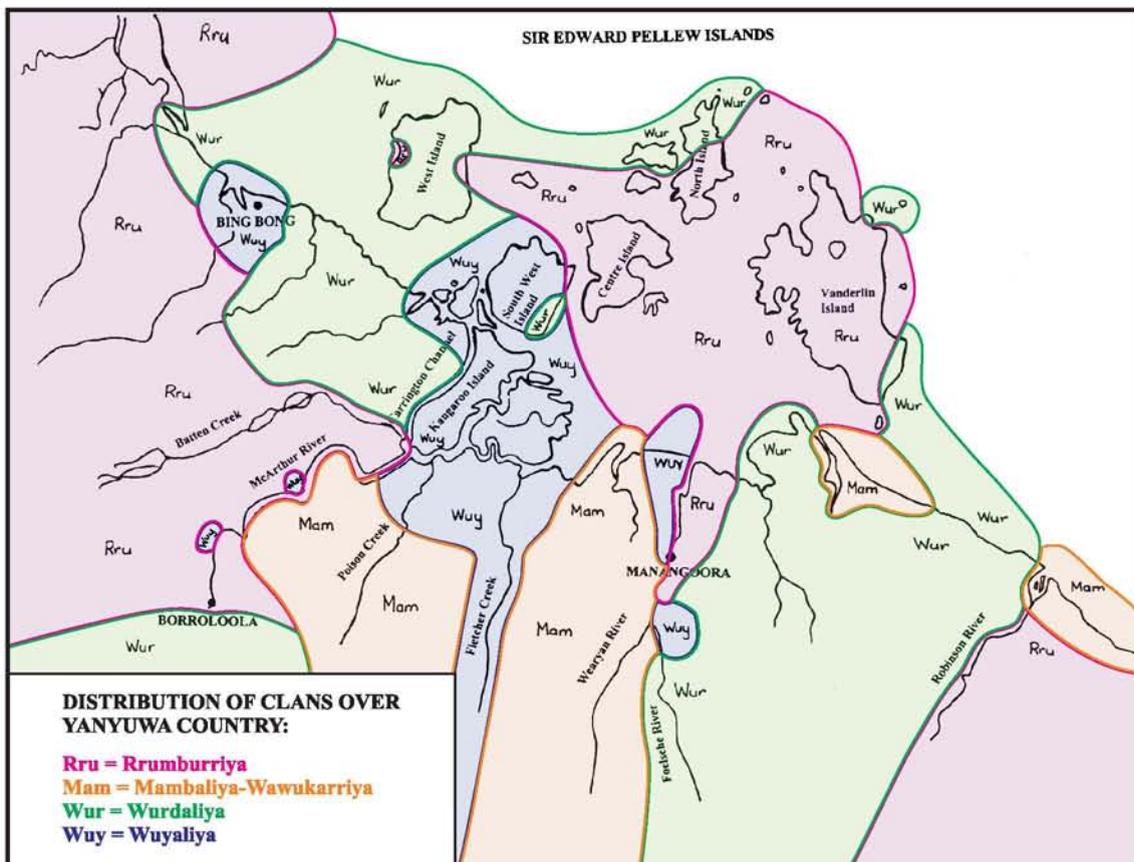
The sea demands a different way of doing things; the Law of the sea, while similar to, is not that of the mainland. For people such as the Yanyuwa the sea provides an overpowering sense of connectedness and images of the "journey" and "transformation". Ancestral beings first travelled the sea, some in the image of species such as sharks, marine turtles (see Map), dugong and sea birds for example, and others are human-like in form such as the *li-Maramaranja Dugong Hunters* travelled the breadth of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands (see Map). They are among many beings that made journeys and who have founded groups of people who are their direct descendants today. These groups are represented by the four Yanyuwa clans: *Rrumburriya*, *Mambaliya-Wawukarriya*, *Wurdaliya* and *Wuyaliya* (see Map). As these beings travelled they transformed their bodies, or moved their bodies in certain ways, creating reefs, sandbars, the tides and tidal currents; it is images such as these that dominate the cosmogonies and cosmologies of the Yanyuwa. These images are in fact central in illustrating how relatedness is at the basis of the Law. A critical aspect of this Law is that it provides an understanding of how names and naming are crucial to its activation, transferal and negotiation. People carry names from their sea country, they know the names of the

different parts of the sea as demonstrated above, and they know the names of the reefs and sandbars, the channels and beaches; they also have names for the sea winds, the waves and the calm sea. It is an environment full of a particular vocabulary and other ways of thinking and knowing.

Each cosmogonic action of the Ancestral beings establishes a relationship between an ancestral being, a place and a group of people who identify with the land and own it, the image of the journey is held to be the mechanism which orders, distributes and differentiates groups' rights to and ownership of particular tracts of land or countries. These are important issues; the images of journey cross many hundreds of kilometers. For example the Groper Ancestor (a-Kuridi) of the Wuyaliya clan began her travels in north west Queensland at a place called Ngurdurri in Ganggalida country, close to the old Doomadgee mission. She travelled looking for country and found it on South West Island in Yanyuwa country; she traveled around and named most of South West Island (see Map) and she then travelled north west and came to a place near Numbulwar before going south and travelling up the Roper River and finishing her travels amongst the Marra and Wandarrang people at a place called Nyamaranguru, the same name as one of the important sites for the Groper on South West Island. Thus while there may be no known links of blood kinship amongst these people, the people who share

the Groper as an ancestral being are seen to share a substance derived from the common ancestor, they are kin, there is a regional network established by such actions that daily transform themselves into duties of regional obligation and sharing of ritual. What is important is the way in which ancestral actions of transformations and of the journey are pervasive images which convey different levels of relatedness among ancestral events; a group owning a given place, and among the places which constitute the trajectory of any ancestral journey.

The Law that Shark or Groper, for example, put down establishes a series of overlapping local and spatio-temporal connections, first of all between places that they shaped and named along his journey (a stretch of sea or an area of the coast shaped by hitting the ground with their heads), and further on, a depression the creatures imprinted with his tail. Second, these bodily transformations at each place also connect the plants, animals and phenomena with which he has interacted. The plants, like the place itself, which grow there are imbued with his power. Third, by bestowing these places upon different groups of people, he related the groups who are positioned at different stages of his journey. These groups identify with Shark and Groper; they are Shark and Groper people, yet they are associated with and are responsible for different aspects of the practical teaching and esoteric knowledge given to them.



These journeys establish kinship links, not only between humans, but they also provide a basis by which kinship is established to place, land, living and “non-living” things. In this way a place or an animal is one's mother because it belongs to one's mother's group; similarly a dugong is kin to the particular sea grass species and sea birds are kin to fish. In other words, animals and plants are considered to be kin and be related to their environment and other animals, rather than having a particular behaviour and inhabiting a biological habitat. It is indicative that, coastal Indigenous people would say, the Law of an animal not only refers to its biological and behavioural characteristics such as diet, size, colouring and habitat but also to what is perceived to be its temperament, moral orientation, and intentionality or “cleverness. The nature of relatedness established between place, ancestral event and people goes beyond what is usually characterised as observable biological phenomena. Because of contemporary issues associated with maritime and coastal management it needs to be stressed that “putting down the Law” encompasses both the classification of animals according to their biological characteristics as well as to their potential to be cultural, moral and social beings, who indeed created humanity. We are dealing here with a non-human centred moral ecology premised on attributions of intentionality, obligation, responsibility and reciprocity. (cf. Bradley 2001; Rose 1993). It is only by understanding this is it possible to even come close to understanding how Yanyuwa people may frame their concerns; these are issues, as stated above, of cross-cultural communication and ones that can not be taken for granted. The sea is an Ancestor in itself, it is sentient, it watches and if provoked by wrongful action by Indigenous kin or non-indigenous people it will release its wrath, it will hold back desired food stuff, it will create tempestuous seas that no boat can cross.

Sea people such as the Yanyuwa do not see themselves as, to quote Tindale (1974:121-122), “scrub covered upland dwellers”; sea people are distinctive, their own perception and other people's perceptions of them are as a people apart, who hunt dugong, sea turtle and fish, who are ecologically, economically technologically and ancestrally distinct. There are still great contrasts between the life of people who call the sea home and those that don't.

Amidst all of the important discussion that people have had, and continue to have about the sea and coastal country, there are also the less intimate but no less important relationship of people, creatures and environment. As Annie Karrakayn, a senior Yanyuwa woman, has commented concerning sea

birds, in particular the white-bellied sea eagle, “They make me think about my country, my island, my sea, my mother, poor things”. What is being demonstrated in such a statement are the deep and enduring emotional links between people and their sea country, and highlights an evocative and emotional attachment of “things” to people. The Yanyuwa people of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands stand within an ecological system dominated by thoughts of the sea, which has as a part of its integral components human and non-human kin, Ancestral beings, special knowledge and power.

The Law that the Dreamings, the Ancestral beings, left in the land and sea is articulated through the rights and responsibilities of their living kin. These rights and responsibilities are pivotal social and political relationships that will be discussed below.



Wulibirra (Red Bluff), North Island
country of the White-bellied Sea Eagle (**a-Karnkarnka**) Ancestral being

Ngalki awara Clans and the sea country

Regardless of what area of the sea or islands within Yanyuwa country it will have as one of its foundational reference points an association with one of the four clans that Yanyuwa families belong to. These four clans divide people, land, plants, animals, natural phenomena and Ancestral beings are classified into one of the four named groups, thus nothing is taken for granted, all things belong and can be related to because of these clans (see Table 1).

Recruitment of people into any of the clans is through patrilineal descent; therefore a person belongs to the same clan of his or her father. However the children of a marriage may belong to the clan of their father but they also have important rights and responsibilities in regard to the country of

their mother and in some instance to the land of their father's mother. In terms of Law, it is believed that marriage partners should be found in the opposite unnamed half of the community.

The clans are grouped into two unnamed halves and for those have the knowledge the system serves at one instance as a shorthand code for very specific relationships. Within each clan an individual can locate people of more than kinship relationship and also those that are the same as them. Thus, for example, if a man were from the **Mambaliya-Wawukarriya** clan he would find his father and father's brothers and sisters, his father's father and father's father's sister. He would also find all of own siblings.

Table 1: Structure and Yanyuwa Families

Yanyuwa Families			
Unnamed Half		Unnamed Half	
Clan	Clan	Clan	Clan
Rrumburriya	Mambaliya-Wawukarriya	Wuyaliya	Wurdaliya

In the **Rrumburriya** clan he would find his mother's mother and mother's mother's brothers, in the **Wuyaliya** clan he would find his mother, mother's brothers, cross cousins and mother's father and mother's father's sister, and in the **Wurdaliya** clan he would find his wife, brothers-in-law, and daughter's children and father's mother and father's mother's brother. The clans then mirror four lines of descent from a grandparent level; not only are human relatives found within these clans but also all of the non-human kin can be matched to this system as well.

The clan system is important because it codifies relationships of importance in terms of management of land; the clans provide the frameworks for much intergroup alignment. As such the clan system has a pivotal role in discussing what can be done on country and who can do it. If a Yanyuwa person is asked as to who owns a particular section of island or sea a family surname may be given which will match a clan category, this is because all people belonging to a clan are perceived as owning all land and sea with the same clan category (see Map).

It should also be noted that one clan, **Mambaliya-Wawukarriya**, has a double name; this is the only clan that does not have any island country, although they do have coastal country, reefs and sea grass beds which are under their control. The coastal members of this group are called **Wawukarriya** while the members from further inland are called **Mambaliya**. Within the group's daily social interaction they speak of each as being "one mob together".

Ngimarringki Owners

For every tract of sea and island or coastline there is a clan that will say that it belongs to them, further more there will be two principal subgroups who will claim responsibility for this country. These are the **ngimarringki**, those people whose father's come from the country, and the **jungkayi**, those people whose mother's come from the country. The significance of this division is that the wants, needs and responsibilities in relation to country are divided between those that are **jungkayi** and those that are **ngimarringki**. These divisions, distributions and responsibilities are subject to conditions of age and gender.

The effect of the system is that people are both **ngimarringki** for one area of country and **jungkayi** for another. There are also those people who, by merit of age, status and/or knowledge may hold extra-territorial responsibilities and authority. In regard to the issues in this report people such as Pyro Dirdiyalma, Dinah Norman and Annie Karrakayn hold such status.

Members of the same clan will use the term **ngimarringki** to describe their responsibilities to a given tract of land, islands or sea. **Ngimarringki** is a term which expresses in a general descriptive way the relationship a person has to specific country and the Ancestral beings and resources that are present. Like many Yanyuwa words, however, the meaning of the word is sometimes totally dependent on context. In English the term is often translated as owner or boss, and as with the Yanyuwa term these two terms are also open to interpretation.

There is no hard and fast rule which can be applied to the usage of the term **ngimarringki**. Its particular meaning at any one time is determined by context and situation whereby the time and the place when the term is being used allows the hearer to determine whether it is being used in an inclusive or exclusive form.

The **ngimarringki** see themselves as direct paternal descendants of the Ancestral beings, they have names that are derived from the Ancestral beings which highlights their closeness as kin, but from birth the **ngimarringki** are separated from their Ancestral beings, and particular the sites on the land and sea where their power is particularly felt to be powerfully present. These places can only be accessed with the assistance of the **jungkayi**, the maternal kin of the **ngimarringki**.

Jungkayi - Guardians

As with the term **ngimarringki**, the term **jungkayi** is also context specific but in English the term is often translated as policeman, boss, manager, worker and guardian. Without the **jungkayi**, the **ngimarringki** are in a helpless situation in regard to their relationship to their Ancestral beings.

The relationship of an individual to his or her mother's country and mother's Ancestral beings is one of high emotional feeling. There are times when it appears that this feeling rises above that which an individual has for his or her father's Ancestral beings and country. People generally refer to the country of their mother by saying simply, 'my mother's country'. Such a simple statement belies the complexity of this relationship. In the broadest sense the term **jungkayi** applies to those people who stand in a child's relationship to the country and Ancestral beings of his or her mother and her clan.

Jungkayi call the Ancestral beings of the **ngimarringki** 'mother' but the **ngimarringki** do not call their own Ancestral beings 'father'. If the **ngimarringki** do need to address their own Ancestral beings they use the term **ja-murimuri** or 'most senior paternal grandfather', a more formal and respectful term. The **jungkayi** have a different and

more intimate association which is expressed by the term 'mother' or the special Yanyuwa term used to describe this relationship *ja-yakurra*. *Ja-yakurra* is a formal way of saying 'my Ancestral mother'.

There are three main areas where the *jungkayi* demonstrates responsibility towards country. They are:

- (i) Visits to important Ancestral sites and other restricted areas;
- (ii) Performance of ritual and mediation between the secular and sacred, this is more obviously observed during times of funerals and other issues associated with death;
- (iii) General educators and advisors. This can take place on a day-to-day basis but it is more obvious during meetings that may be held at Borroloola, especially those that have a focus on land and sea issues.

Jungkayi must accompany *ngimarringki* when the important sites and places on their country are being visited. They walk ahead of the *ngimarringki*, talking and explaining to the spiritual inhabitants of the country, explaining why they have entered an area.

The Sir Edward Pellew Islands and surrounding coastal areas contain many human burials, lodged in caves, rock shelters and ledges. Such places are where the spirits of the deceased concentrate. The Yanyuwa consider that the spirits of the deceased behave in a similar way to the living. They hunt dugong and turtle, they move over country as invisible companions to the living, but both are said to be aware of each other. These spirits are often casually referred to as the 'old people' (*li-wankala*), and are more keenly felt in sacred places, in burial sites and areas where the Ancestral beings are said to reside - areas to which people do not normally go. This is why entry into such places must be announced by a *jungkayi*, as they are considered the only people who can successfully mediate between the spirits of the living and deceased kin.

In potentially very dangerous places even the power of the *jungkayi* is somewhat diminished. There are certain parts of the environment that they find difficult to approach, and this is especially so where the sites are associated with predominately negative power. The Mosquito site on the central coast of South West Island, the Louse site on the southern tip of Centre Island and the Rainbow Serpent at Pearce and Urquhart Islands are good examples of such places. If the power at such places were to be activated it is thought to work against the general well being of all life forms and established ecology of the land.

In general, most major places where Ancestral beings are said to reside are not normally visited. Sites associated with potential danger are very rarely visited; even the *jungkayi* are loathe to do so because of the potential danger and human risk. The *jungkayi* can, however, normally enter these areas without seeking permission from the *ngimarringki*. This is especially the case where objects of great sacred value have been placed. *Jungkayi* can gather resources at these places, they can hunt and fish if they choose, but none of the foodstuffs gathered may be eaten by the *Ngimarringki*. Such places have quite strict boundaries associated with them, but the rules and the boundaries are constructed by the *jungkayi* and can be also released by them. For example Red Bluff (*Wulibirra*) and the *Liwarrangka* the peninsula on the north central coast of South West Island are extremely sacred places and have exclusion boundaries that are well known by the Yanyuwa people (see Map). These boundaries are still policed and maintained by the relevant *jungkayi*. There are other areas on the islands that were once as strictly enforced as the above areas but the restrictions have been eased and in some instances relaxed altogether. The important sea turtle rookery site *Maabany* on the north coast of West Island was once under closed access but in the early 1980s these restrictions were released after the *jungkayi* and *ngimarringki* for the area held consultations. However the memory of this place's past status is maintained and there are still certain nearby areas where people will not go. The small island *Riyinbirr* (Little West Island), to the immediate west of this beach, is still a place of restricted access. Similarly the stretch of mangroves on the eastern side of the Davies Channel mouth (*Mangurrungurru*) was up until quite recent times restricted country, however feelings that the place had been desecrated by constant intrusion by fishermen and crabbers and subsequent conversations between the *jungkayi* and *ngimarringki* has removed these restrictions.

There are three forms of access recognized by the Yanyuwa *ngimarringki* and *jungkayi*.

- (i) *kurdukurdu* / *nganjirra* totally forbidden, only *jungkayi* may enter and *ngimarringki* are invited by the *jungkayi* to accompany them.
- (ii) *warruki* places where after a long period of time the total restriction against entry has been eased and *ngimarringki* can enter and gather food, though many will still not visit the actual focal site that led to the place being made restricted in the first place. *Wurdalnguwa*, Skull Island and part of *Lidayidbulungu*, Watson Island, are good examples of this kind of place.



Ngurrbunguwa (Little Island)
Sea Ranger Graham Friday with beached Short-finned Pilot Whales (*Yulangu /Kungkabubu*).
Graham is also *jungkayi* for these creatures.

(iii) **lhamarnda** place where any one can enter at any time. There are no restrictions; there may be particular areas close by that carry the above two designations but people are careful not to enter into such places. The majority of the island and sea country is like this. It is also worth noting that **lhamarnda** places can become country of restricted access following the death of senior land owners, and these restrictions are lifted following consultations between the **jungkayi** and **ngimarringki** for the country in question.

Conclusions

Such negotiations between **ngimarringki** and **jungkayi** are constant and are a reminder that politics of country play a key role in relation to Yanyuwa identity and their understanding of themselves. The **jungkayi / ngimarringki** system is not frozen in time and space, it is a fluid system that is responsive to contemporary times and involves both men and women and as a system it is a complex one of many varied relationships that are constantly being negotiated. One of the more complex issues in

contemporary times is the ignorance of such systems by people that visit Yanyuwa country, the following two statements highlight these issues:

It is a mistake - they (tourists/fishermen) should be asking the old people about the country. They are just travelling without care; They are not asking the senior leaders for the country.

(Thelma Douglas 2005)

Those tourists and fishermen have spoilt the country of my mother, I am jungkayi, they have broken the path of the song that runs to the north, they are shutting up the country.

(Dinah Norman 2005)

Such comments echo a belief that humans animate the land for good or ill. Ignorant people such as fishermen, crabbers and tourists can harm its culturally conceptualised political and ecological processes. Yanyuwa views of the part they play in their country are concerned with such political and

ecological processes, rather than them just being in a state of being. It is in light of this albeit brief discussion it becomes easier to see why the Yanyuwa communities are anxious about their country and why offence can be easily caused by land managers, tourists, fishermen and other travellers when this Indigenous system of politics and land management is either ignored or treated in a cursory fashion. In much modern political rhetoric there has been discussion about the problems of Indigenous kinship as it may relate to development; however, rather than being problems it can be argued that such systems, as held by the Yanyuwa, are strong political systems that can be built upon in regard to management and as a measure of restoring a sense of well being in relation to the sea country. The li-Anthawirryarra Sea Ranger program is an important part of this process because it has people working in it who are sea and island people.

Holding the Country

"Do you know why we are here? We are here because of other people's greed"

(Archie Johnston 2005)

Introduction

The above quote was given in relation to the investigations about people's concerns for the islands and sea country. Similar sentiments were given throughout the consultations with various men and women who have rights and responsibilities to the sea country. These concerns are not recent, they have not become topics for conversations and discussions within the last few months or years; many of the issues that are to be raised in this section have been points of heated discussion, anger, frustration, sadness and grief for over two decades. Many of the people spoken to also expressed frustration that they have been telling the same stories, about the same issues for two decades, causing one senior woman to suggest that, "White people are only good for stealing the brains of Aboriginal people" (Annie Karrakayn 2005). What is meant by this phrase is that so many discussions and meetings have been held about concerns for the sea country, so many stories have been told, so many notes have been taken but nothing ever appears to happen.

This section of the report provides details of issues and priorities for the Yanyuwa people of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and surrounding seas. It is important at this point to note that present Yanyuwa attitudes to their sea country are as much a result of their knowledge of their own Law as they are the result of influences arising from, and associated with, the relatively recent history of dispossession, assimilation, evangelising and policies of "self determination" and contact with other people who

see economic advantage in their sea country, such as crabbers, tourists and fishermen. An important implication of this understanding is that changes to understanding are predicated by people's actual lived experiences. Changes to attitudes and perceptions will not take place unless there is a corresponding change in all of the models and systems which may, implicitly or explicitly, support and legitimise non-Indigenous response to Indigenous perceptions and understandings. This suggests, then, that educational and information exchange programs aimed at assisting Indigenous people in regards to the management of their sea and coastal country may take time. Such an understanding also suggests, however, that the processes of communication need to take into account that the use of terms, concepts and ideas which may be thought of as universal or fixed may not be so. To effectively work with people such as the Yanyuwa may, in actual fact, mean going back to the principles behind the messages that are seen as necessary, and redefining them according to geographical and cultural context.

The respondents spoke in terms of issues of concern and interest; while there is some overlap in these, for ease of documentation they are recorded under these general headings.

Sites on the Islands and in the Sea

"White people don't know where they are going, they run over country...might be a big place, Dreaming place with a lot of law and business and then what we going to do, we here just looking at them, and we fighting each other"

(Amy Friday 2005)

For the Yanyuwa people the sea and islands are full of signs of the past activities and the continued presence of the Ancestral beings. Such places represent the focus of the power and authority of many Ancestral beings that crisscrossed the islands and sea. To the outside observer many of these sites appear no different than the surrounding land or seascape, whilst some sites appear visually impressive. Examples of such sites would be the large sand dune systems at Cape Vanderlin (Muluwa), these sand dune systems are the physical embodiment of the Wave Ancestral being (a-rumu), and White Craggy Islet (Wadarrila) is associated with the movements of the Dugong Hunter Ancestral beings (li-Maramaranja). Areas of sea that contain no visible markers can be very important; the sea in the vicinity of the Crooked River mouth is associated with the important and potentially dangerous Blue Ringed Octopus Dreaming Ancestral being (li-Jakarambirri). This Ancestral being is also the physical earthly embodiment of the Seven Sister/Pleiades star constellation.



Looking south to *Rarangkiliwunyarra* and *Nungkalumulungka* (Three Hummocks). East coast of Vanderlin Island. Country of a Sea Turtle (*Wundanyuka*) Ancestral being.

Generally speaking Yanyuwa people do not draw attention to these places, because the telling of the Law associated with them and the visiting of such places is controlled by the **ngimarringki** and **jungkayi** system. Other sites are also seen to be potentially dangerous and therefore are not likely to be visited or talked about in the presence of strangers.

Over the last two decades some of these sites have been visited by persons unknown and damage has taken place, objects of great sanctity have been stolen or broken up and rubbish has been left at many of these places. For the Yanyuwa people it is difficult to know what to do; signposting attracts attention that may not be wanted, but conversely appropriate sign posting could lead to respect. There has only been an attempt of interpretive signing on the Pellews Islands and this was in relation to important sites that are around the area of Camp Beach (**Maraninjanga**) on Centre Island. Two information signs were placed on the beach telling the story for the area. The signs lasted two weeks; they were never seen again.

The sanctity and protection of these sites is an important obligation for Yanyuwa people, many of

the sites in the area are registered by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority in Darwin. The li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit is seen by many Yanyuwa people as having a vital role in the constant monitoring of sites over the islands and sea country. The following issues have been identified in relation to these issues.

- Some sites should not be talked about, or signposted, it is better that their knowledge is not made public knowledge. However such sites should also be monitored and if damage or theft of cultural material takes place then other ways of protecting the site may need to be discussed.
- Any entry onto sites should be done with consultation and approval of the appropriate **jungkayi** and **ngimarringki**.
- Some sites could be signposted with informative information as a process that demonstrates the willingness of Yanyuwa people to share their country.
- Information pamphlets and booklets could be developed that illustrate the importance of the islands and sea country to the Yanyuwa people. These could be purchased at Borroloola, the Ranger office or the information centre at King Ash Bay.

- Education of younger Yanyuwa people about the sites that exist on the islands and sea, is also seen as important. Not all families have boats, or fathers and grandfathers that can take them out to the sea and islands, thus other ways of getting people onto country have to be developed so that they can be educated in such matters.

Sea Grass, Dugong and Sea Turtle

li-Anthawirriyarra is the name of Sea Ranger Unit at Borroloola; it is also the name the Yanyuwa people use to describe themselves, this term which is best translated as “those people whose spiritual and cultural heritage comes from the sea”; it is a term that describes an intense relationship with the sea. The sea is the metaphor for existence and identity, thus it is not surprising that it the sea that is of primary concern to the Yanyuwa men and women that were spoken to through the course of gathering documentation for this report. In terms of priority given to the sea, issues surrounding the sea grass beds, dugong and sea turtle were of primary concern.

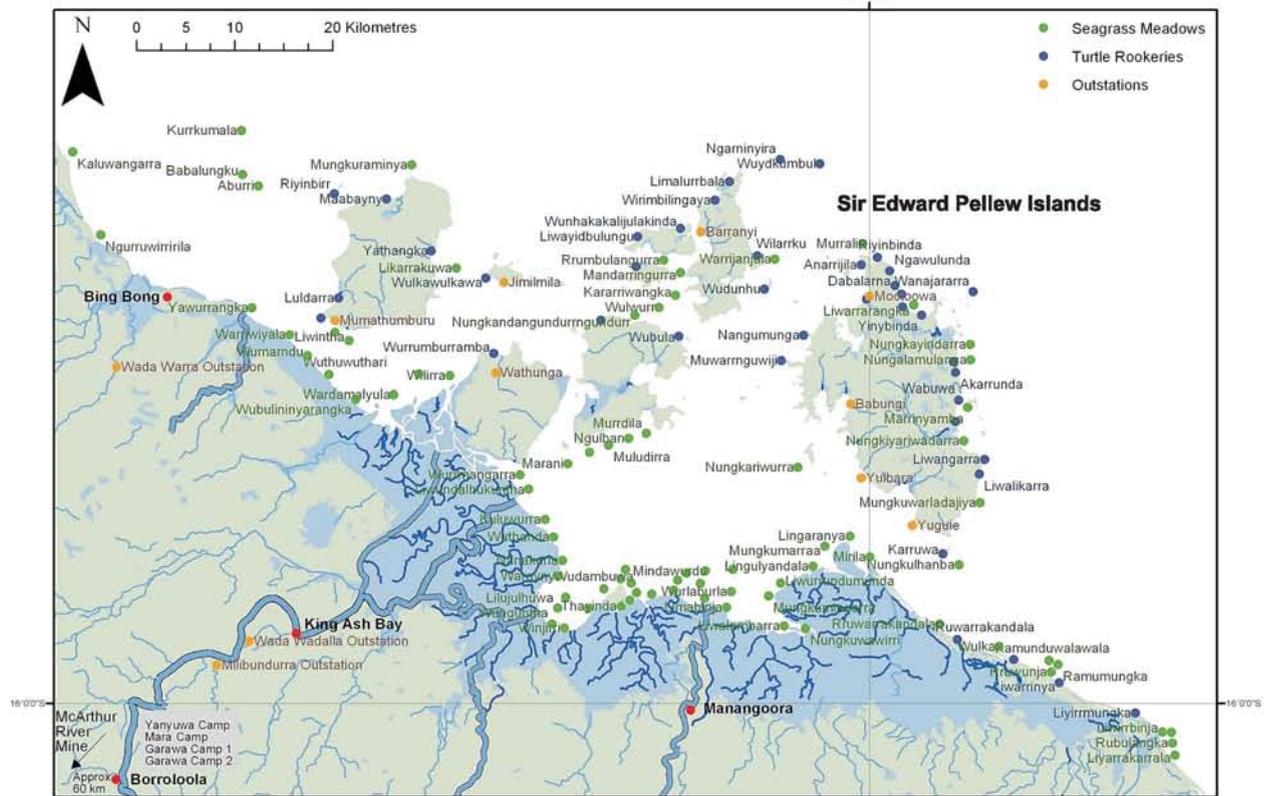
Seagrass

The sea and underwater country of the Yanyuwa is, as with the mainland, often called by the term **awara**. It is a word that conveys a large number of meanings such as earth, ground, place, country, camp, sea, reefs and sandbars. The term highlights the Yanyuwa concept that the sea and the underwater country are

known places, that they are named. As such, it is perfectly reasonable to ask for a name of a stretch of sea, reef or sandbar or sea grass bed. Often the sea grass beds are seen to be an extension of the mainland and carry the same name as a section of the coast. In other cases the sea grass beds and reefs have their own names by which they and the surrounding area of sea are known.

Sea grass beds known in Yanyuwa are **maraman** which means 'sea grass', while the drop off, or deep water point associated with the northern edges of sea grass beds is called **na-ngunantha**. It is a term that carries with it the term of home or camp; it is the place where the dugong and sea turtle wait before coming up onto the sea grass beds to feed at high tide.

Because these sea grass beds and reefs are seen to be country which is identifiable by name and therefore known; it is owned. The underwater country has clan association, and thus it too is intertwined within the social working of the **jungkayi** and **ngimarringki** system. The majority of sea grass beds which follow the coast are associated with the **Wurdaliya** and **Wuyaliya** clans, with smaller areas associated with the **Rumburriya** and **Mambaliya-Wawukarriya** clans. Many of the more northerly reefs that have sea grass areas belong to the Rumburriya clan. (see Map).



Named Seagrass Beds and Reefs Over Yanyuwa Country

Kurrkumala	Wamandu	Wilira	Rumalamarla	Wudambuwa	Wuminyamba	Limbinja	Lingyandala	Kamunduwalwala	Mungkuwarladajya	Nungkarwura	Wulwurr
Babelungku	Wuthuwuthari	Wurmangarra	Warayny	Lidambuwa	Wandangujarra	Wurleburla	Mungkumarras	Ramumungka	Nungkiyarwadarra	Warjanjala	Karantwangka
Aburri	Wubulinnyarangka	Marani	Wunguntha	Lwalangka	Bulubulwiji	Lingambalngamba	Lingaranya	Liwinbinja	Marrinyamba	Murdila	Mandarringarra
Kaluwangarra	Manthanduria	Likundalhukuntha	Lilujuluwa	Wikahwikala	Lukuthukuthila	Nungkuwawiri	Miria	Nungkandalamarra	Nungalamulianga	Ngublan	Rumbalangarra
Ngumwirinila	Lwintha	Kutuwura	Limalyalarra	Rudanbabands	Kwiminybamku	Lwalambara	Ruwarakandala	Rubulangka	Nungkayindarra	Muludira	Likarakuwa
Yawurangka	Wardamalyula	Wuthanda	Thayinda	Thayinda	Mindawudu	Mungkumingarra	Wulka	Liyarakarra	Lwararangka	Limginda	Mungkuraminy
Warriwiyala	Wubilinnyarra	Nanakurta	Kawurthwi	Mawukakali	Maruwamala	Liwurundumunda	Ruwunja	Nungkulhanba	Murrall	Nungkandangunduragundur	

In Yanyuwa the term **maraman** is used to describe all seagrass species. Seagrasses that are perceived to belong to the major seagrass beds that follow the coastline and may be exposed at low tide are called by the term **ma-lhanngu**. This term would encompass the following species: *Syringodium isoetifolium* (by far the most common species in the area), *Halodule univervis*, *Halophila ovalis* (small), *Halophila spinulosa* and *Halophila ovalis* (large).

There is also a distinction made between seagrasses that are found on inshore and offshore reefs. The seagrasses found on reefs are often described as the 'proper food' for the sea turtles, though it is acknowledged that dugong will eat them too. The term **na-wirralbirral** is used for inshore seagrasses; this term is given to the species known as *Cymodocea rotundata*. However, any seagrass species that is found on these inshore reefs will also be called **na-wirralbirral**. The term **na-julangal** is used for those species of seagrass that are found on offshore reefs, and the term is best associated with the species *Cymodocea surrulata* and *Thalassia hemprichii* and quite often *Halophila spinulosa* which is also categorised by another term when found on the major sea grass beds.

Also associated with the reefs is algae, and the Yanyuwa believe that this is also eaten by both dugong and sea turtle. This information concurs with what is known of dugong and sea turtle feeding habits (Lanyon *et al.* 1989; Marsh *et al.* 1982) although the Yanyuwa hunters believe the sea turtle feeds on the algae more often than does the dugong. The algae are known as **miyalmiyal**. Yanyuwa hunters also believe that dugong, in particular, seek out the algae when they are not well. According to Marsh (pers. comm., 1996), this could be so, but it also could be starvation food, when the sea grass beds have been severely traumatized, such as occurred in 1985 after Cyclone Sandy or after any major flood when seagrass beds are covered in sediment carried downstream and out to the coast by the floodwaters.

One species of seagrass, *Enhalus acoroides*, is classed on its own. It is the largest species of seagrass in the area and is often called "tape grass" or "tape

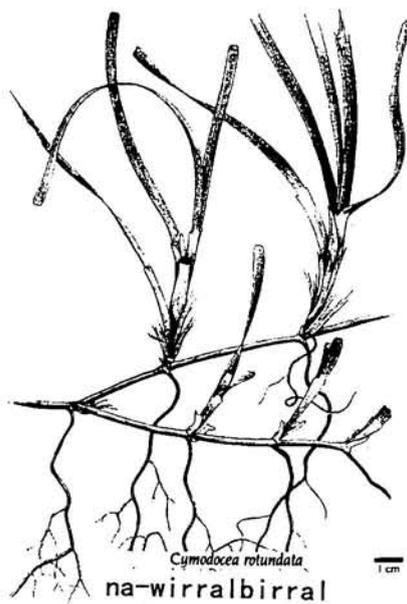
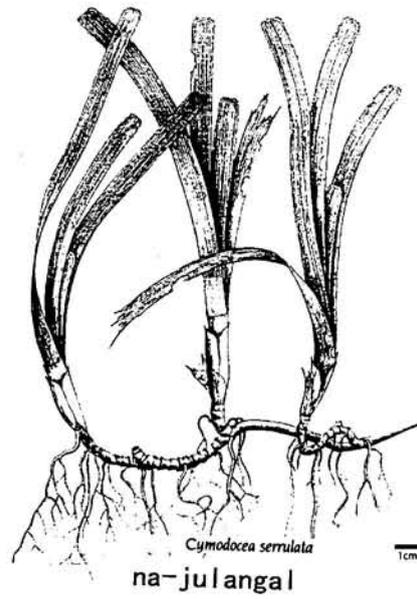
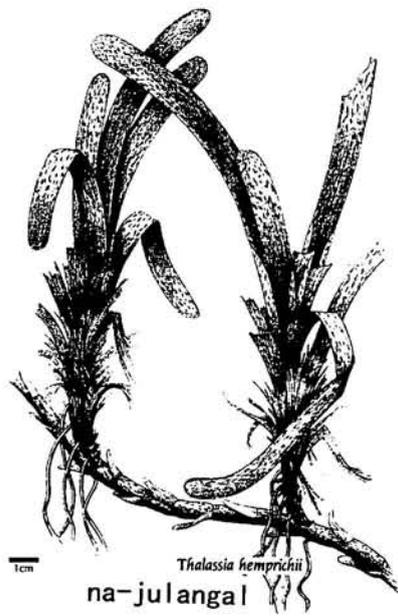
weed" in local English. In Yanyuwa this species is called **ma-warladaji**; there is also an older archaic Yanyuwa term for it called **ma-barnayurruwarlu**. This seagrass is of interest to many Yanyuwa hunters because of all species they believe that it is in decline; they speak of it once being common in Dugong Creek (**Wuthanda**) and on the mud bank (**Nungkumarraa**) near the mouth of the Fat Fellows Creek (**Milira**) and also along the south eastern coast of Vanderlin where one of the names of the area is **Mungkuwarladajiya** which is a possessive form of the noun that this sea grass is known by. Yanyuwa hunters are keen observers of their environment, observations that have been built up over many, many years. Observation of a loss of any species is cause for concern, and this issue will be returned to below.

The Yanyuwa perceive that there is a close relationship existing between the varying seagrasses and the dugong and sea turtle is best evidenced in the expression '**walya nyiki-nganji ki-maramangku**' 'the dugong and sea turtle they are kin to the sea grass' (Charlie Miller 1980). In Yanyuwa the term **nganji** kin is used to describe relationships between species where a codependency is perceived. It is said by the Yanyuwa, obviously enough, that without the seagrass there would be no sea turtles or dugong; but likewise it is said that without the dugong and sea turtle, there would be no seagrass, as the feeding upon it keeps it healthy.

There is a term in Yanyuwa, **na-wurndarnda**, that describes the line of mangroves that fringe the sea grass beds and the actual sea grass beds. It is a biological zone recognized by the Yanyuwa as important for the well being of all the islands because it is here that the immature fish and prawns live, and it is where nutrients are washed into the sea to nurture both the immature species that live there but also the seagrass beds. For the Yanyuwa these are important places that demonstrate important biological relationships. As is typical in any understanding of Yanyuwa perceptions of the environment there are threads of connection that weave through the entire environment. Without the **na-wurndarnda** region all living things would suffer.



Where the mangrove forests meet the sea is called **na-wurndarnda**. Yanyuwa recognize the importance of this environment for the continued well being of all their country.



Illustrations by Geoff Kelly from Lanyon (1986)

Sea Grass species identified in the area of the Pellew Islands

Dugong and Sea Turtle

The dugong and sea turtle they are sea creatures of authority, they belonged to our ancestors and they belong to us they are like the fruit of the cycad food as it too is a food of authority.

(Nora Jalirduma, 1988)

The Yanyuwa term *walya*, includes dugong and all species of sea turtle. It is one of the most detailed and complex categories in Yanyuwa biological classification, including, for example, 16 different names for dugong. Such detailed taxonomies are an indication of the importance of these creatures to the Yanyuwa way of life and as such they will be discussed in more detail.

Yanyuwa consider dugong and sea turtle to be food sources of *wurrama* or 'authority' and as having their own 'Law'. The concept of 'Law' and 'authority' informs an understanding of the way in which these creatures are classified and demonstrates that cultural understanding are an integral part of the classificatory process.

In Yanyuwa classification, the dugong, the green sea turtle and the fruit of the cycad palm (*Cycas angulata*) are all classed as being food sources of *wurrama* or authority. In past times they were considered to be those food sources which were essential for the physical as well as the spiritual survival of the Yanyuwa people. At the present time, the cycad palm fruit is rarely gathered and processed, although when people speak of it their voices will still resonate with a degree of emotion, highlighting

the importance that this food source has in the historical view of the Yanyuwa environment and their place in it (Bradley 1988:1-29).

The dugong and sea turtle are still important. They represent continuity with the past, and in times that are rapidly changing, an affirmation of the ability to be able to maintain links with the past. This is demonstrated by the hunting of these creatures and in the expression of other knowledge associated with them.

Yanyuwa men and women say that all living things have their own Law. The word Law is an allusive term that can refer to plants and animals having their own culture and creation stories, or their own way of being, their own habits and way of doing things. This Law can be observed and interpreted by human beings. An obvious example of this is the brolga (*Grus rubicunda*). It appears to the Yanyuwa as a creature which has a strong Law; its red head, elegant dimensions, its trumpeting calls and spectacular dancing displays are evidence that the brolga, **kurdarrku**, is a highly developed creature in relation to the possession of its own culture or Law.

The sense that the various species have their own culture is also evidenced in that they have their own favoured food sources and localities and that they behave in certain ways. It is also felt that all life forms such as animals, plants, insects, fish and birds have the ability to make perceptions about the environment they live in and evaluate a given situation. Ultimately, they are seen to be totally



Maranja a dugong hunter, Graham Friday with harpoon. (Photo Scott Whiting)

conscious and responsible beings. Furthermore, just as human beings observe and interpret the actions of other living things, it is also felt that living things observe and interpret the actions of human beings. As such, they too are part of the established Law that began when their own Spirit Ancestors first moved on the landscape. Thus, the Dugong Ancestral being not only provides a basis by which human beings can try to understand dugong, but the original Dugong Ancestral being is also seen to provide the reasons why dugong behave like dugong. The everyday observance of these habits such as mating, giving birth to young, feeding habits, growth and eventual death are then seen to be elements which express the eternity of the natural order which is simply called the Law. Such processes are a continual restatement about how things were in the very beginning, and how it is hoped they always will be. The names that things are called are important and are ultimately bound up within the concepts of any creature's particular Law, as Annie Karrakayn highlights:

All things got a name, that's their own name for themselves, they've had that name from the start, and that's the only name we know how to use, you've got big names and little names, some things got more than one name...but everything has a name.

(Annie Karrakayn 1994)

As with the physical landscape, the ability to call the name of something is to begin to understand and know it. Not to know the names is to stand in considerable ignorance. The Yanyuwa possess many names for the dugong and sea turtle, and the knowing of these names is the beginning of coming to understand the culture or Law of these creatures. Thus, classification is seen to be more than partitioning nature into groups; for the Yanyuwa the names of things are linked to the creation period and the various dreaming ancestors and are seen to be part of the Law for that creature. Existing processes of classification are an expression of this understanding.

A general principle of Yanyuwa biological classification is the division between coastal/marine as opposed to inland/mainland species. This categorisation is not rigid and, depending on circumstances, some animal and plant species will move between the maritime and mainland categories. Usually such examples have more to do with individual perception of the species involved which in group discussions can be the source of lively debate. Generally any species seen to be associated with the sea, islands and coast are called **wurralngu**, a term meaning literally 'being for depths of the sea'; by extension, however, the term is also used to describe any creature which is perceived to belong to the marine and island environment.

Yanyuwa people, too, are included in this category. The flexibility of this term is reflected in the slightly different ways in which it is used in everyday contexts.

Dugong and sea turtle are of course labelled as **wurralngu**, but are more commonly referred to as **walya**. The term **walya** has no direct English translation, but it is generally translated as 'dugong and sea turtle'. The basis for such a category is probably twofold: firstly, they are the only creatures in the sea that feed extensively on seagrass; secondly, they represent the largest marine animals hunted and are culturally significant.

A number of younger Yanyuwa people have suggested that the term is used because when they go hunting they do not usually know what they are going to get, so it is easier to say that they are going to hunt **walya**. In common everyday Yanyuwa, this is the most common meaning given to the term. In archaic Yanyuwa, the term **walya** was further highlighted by the inclusion of two adjectives, long and short. Thus, **jumanykarra walya** or 'long **walya**' meant dugong, and **wukulkuthu walya** meant 'short **walya**' which was used for turtle; these two terms are very rarely used today.

Dugong

The general term for dugong is **waliki**; this term is further defined with the use of prefixes describing the various noun classes. When prefixed with 'li-' or 'a-' thus appearing as **li-waliki** or **a-waliki**, it is used to describe a herd of dugong. The use of these two prefixes is an indication of how the Yanyuwa perceive the dugong. The prefix 'li-' is used to describe plural, but it is normally only reserved for use on human subjects and sometimes on animals such as dogs, especially if they are pets. Thus the prefix indicates that a degree of intimacy exists between the animal and person.

The prefix 'a' is a feminine prefix normally used to mark that the subject under discussion is female. The prefix also usually denotes the singular, but within archaic Yanyuwa, singular prefix forms are often used to describe plural (Jean Kirton pers. com. 1985). The reason why the feminine prefix is used to describe a large number of dugong is because the Yanyuwa believe that most dugong herds consist predominantly of females with calves, single females, one or two lead bulls and a few young subordinate males.

Another example of this perceived familiarity between dugong and humans is seen in the term **li-milkamillarra**. This word is normally reserved to describe a group of human mothers and their

children, but it is also used to describe a group of dugong cows and calves. The term is also used by the Yanyuwa to highlight their perception that dugong are gregarious and highly social animals and that females and young dominate any given herd. It is also an indication of the way in which an animal's behaviour and an animal's perceived association with people affects the way in which it is classified. In this case it is the noun class prefixes that reveal additional levels of classificatory information.

A difficulty in discussing dugong with the Yanyuwa is the sense that dugong are not just dugong, but rather, there are types or kinds of 'dugongness'. It is rare amongst those people who still speak Yanyuwa as a first language, or for those Yanyuwa who know how to use the special vocabulary associated with dugong, to hear the term **waliki** (dugong) used as the dominant noun. If this word is used, another statement will follow which will tell the hearer what 'kind' of dugong is being talked about. A hunter, or somebody distributing dugong meat, for example, will not just say it is dugong, but rather it is a particular type of dugong. A receiver of meat, or a person hearing that a dugong has been harpooned will enquire, 'What kind of dugong is it?' The answer is always a specific term which can be applied to the kinds of dugong that the Yanyuwa know. Even when out hunting, skilled hunters and observers of dugong can tell from the actions of the various dugong - how they surface, how they roll, dive and move - what kinds of dugong they are looking at.

For non-Yanyuwa people understanding the different types of dugong can be confusing, however, there is little confusion and there is rarely any debate amongst Yanyuwa as to what classification a dugong should be given.

The following discussion emphasises the special nouns used to name the different 'kinds' of dugong and discusses some of the important ecological and cultural characteristics which inform the Yanyuwa processes of classification. It will be noted that there are recurrent references to dugong behaving 'like' humans. The dugong stands alone in being described in such detail using human metaphors. Other animals may be described like this but to a much lesser extent, with the exception perhaps, of the domesticated dog.

Male Dugong

wiriji - This is a term given to any very large, presumably old male and sometimes to presumably no longer productive females. They often have very mottled hides, sometimes near to white on the back, are heavily scarred, and are said to be foul-smelling. They are not hunted as their meat is said to be

unpalatable, but also because these dugong are considered to be 'half-Rainbow Serpents'.

In Yanyuwa belief, all dugong, dolphins and whales are considered to be the offspring of the potentially destructive Rainbow Serpent, whose most visible form is seen in a cyclonic depression. In Yanyuwa, the term **bujimala** is used for an actual Rainbow Serpent, while the term **yulangu** is used for any creature that can potentially manifest itself as a Rainbow Serpent. All dugong can do this, but the **wiriji** is considered to have crossed a line because of its presumed age and size and because its basic 'dugongness' and 'rainbowness' are virtually indistinguishable. This example demonstrates the permeable boundaries inherent in Yanyuwa classification that enable a creature to be a member of more than one classificatory group. In this case the dugong is part of the group **walki** 'dugong' and also part of the group of creatures known as **yulangu** 'potential Rainbow Serpent'.

jiyamirrama - Lone male dugong, sometimes described as a very old male, and sometimes as a male of reproductive age onwards which has been driven away from the herd by the dominant bull. This dugong is unique within Yanyuwa clan classification in that it is a Wuyaliya Ancestral being, while all other dugong are associated with the **Rrumburriya** semi-moiety.

These dugongs are said to be territorial in that they occupy a specific seagrass area and rarely move away from it. The Yanyuwa describe the behaviour of this dugong with a special intransitive verb, **wukuwarrumantharra**, which is best translated as 'belonging only to one place'. These dugong, more than any of the others, are seen to have a close and complex relationship with the seagrass beds. Older Yanyuwa people would describe these dugong using the following phrase: **jiyamirama kumbu-ngka baji ki-maramanda yiwa wirriyarra**, which means, 'the lone male dugong he originated there on the sea grass beds, he is spiritually associated with that place.' In everyday Yanyuwa, the perceived territorial nature of these dugong is simply described as **jibiya baji** or 'a countryman/ inhabitant of that place'.

There is a sense that the presence of lone male dugong over the various seagrass beds makes them responsible for the well-being of the seagrass beds. While other dugong may move off an area, the lone male will stay and maintain the relationship between the dugong and the seagrass.

jiwarnarrila - Young male, nearly full grown but still following the cows.

bungkurl - This dugong is described by the Yanyuwa as a 'stranger that comes from the north', with the Torres Strait region usually being referred to as a possible source. They are not commonly seen, and if seen, are not hunted. Yanyuwa say that they are unusually short and somewhat 'barrel-shaped', and in poor condition. A number of younger hunters call them 'dwarf dugong'. They are also described as being much darker than other dugong. Colour descriptions range from between dark brown to black. People also say that they may also be dugong who grew up without a mother and was therefore starved of milk and protection, which normally would allow it to develop into a fully grown dugong.

mayili - A young male still within the herd, but living on the fringes. It is sometimes referred to as a 'traveller', as it said to travel between the various herds that inhabit the southwest Gulf. This travelling between herds is equated with the way young human males will sometimes travel or congregate together as they look for girlfriends, and hopefully, sexual partners. These dugong will have just erupting or erupted tusks. It is from these young males that some challengers to the dominant bull's authority will arise.

jawaruwaru - A young male which still lives within the herd. It is often described as a 'teenager' in English or a 'young steer' by those men who have spent time working on cattle stations. It is said to be weaned, but because of its youth, stays within the herd because it is no threat to the dominant bull.

rangkarrku - The dominant bull of a herd. Some people say there is only one of them, while others say there are two or three other bulls in a subordinate position that follow him. People give the term **rangkarangkarrku** for the other male followers of the bull. People describe this dugong as being 'just like a man', that is, it is very clever. It is the dominant male's task to lead the herd safely. As the tide begins to rise, this dugong will travel alone and very quietly onto the seagrass beds and make sure it is safe. If all is clear, he will slap the surface of the water with his tail, and the other male followers will lead the cows and calves onto the seagrass. If danger is sensed or the tide begins to change, the dominant male will again slap the water and round up the herd and drive them out into deeper water. This dominant male is also sometimes called **wirumanthangu** or **wirumanthamara**, both meaning "the one which whistles". The dugong is said to communicate with the rest of the herd by whistling.

The following text, recorded by Jean Kirton in 1967 with an old Yanyuwa dugong hunter called Pluto

Wurrumungkumungku, highlights the Yanyuwa perceptions of this dugong:

And that dominant male we can hear it from a long way away, it is there whistling in the water, it is there when we are hunting, and we can hear it in the depths of the sea it is talking, in the depths of the sea along the coast. When he is moving in the depths of the sea we do not see it, we can only hear it. He is bearing with him many dugong, he is bearing them with him and we can hear him whistling. We acknowledge that dominant male, we call out to him, we call out, 'Yes you are there', he is bearing with him many females and calves. He is rounding them up, he is going eastwards and westwards rounding them up, he is talking to them, he is just like a bull rounding up his cows, like a bull he is talking to his cows. He is in the depths of the water, he is moving down inside the water. He is feeding himself as he comes from the north, he is coming. He is bearing with him many dugong he will take them to the shallow water and they will feed themselves, he is continually rounding up the females. Yes we are listening for him, we acknowledge that he is here, 'Here he is, here he is', we say this with an intensity we always acknowledge that dugong that dominant male.

(Pluto Wurrumungkumungku in Kirton 1967, text HD: 29-31)

The concept of acknowledging the dominant male is closely related to the idea that dugong are like humans. By acknowledging the dominant dugong, humans are saying that they understand and accept the authority of that dugong to lead the herd and that, as with humans, dugong have a designation whereby each individual dugong knows and understands its place.

Female Dugong

a-wurduwu - This is a young cow, often called 'a teenager', 'young woman' or a 'heifer'; it is not yet ready to breed. The Yanyuwa term actually translates as 'having a womb'. These young cows are also said to travel among the various herds of dugong. The Yanyuwa equate this moving around with concepts which are embodied in the term **wunji**. This term can be translated as eloping, or running away with a lover or running away with the intent to find or meet a lover. These dugong are sometimes called by the term **a-wurrumbarra** which is the same term given to adolescent girls who are showing the first observable signs of physical maturity.

a-kulhakulhawiji - A young cow, pregnant with its presumed first or second calf. The term literally means, 'being with child'. The stem of the word **kulhakulha** is a human kinship term used by women for their children. The unborn dugong calf is called

nyanki-ardu - 'her child'. It is the only example where both the pronominal prefix meaning 'that specific one for her' and the stem **ardu** meaning 'human child' is used for the offspring of an animal, and is another indication of the Yanyuwa perception that dugong are very similar to humans. Hunters of dugong say they can tell a pregnant dugong by the way it dives sharply in the water after having taken a breath. It was said by older Yanyuwa men and women that a cow dugong on the birth of its young will bury it in the mud until it gets strong enough to travel with its mother. It is a story still discussed by the older Yanyuwa hunters, but they give the impression that it is information that belonged to the old people which they do not necessarily have to accept as correct. Once old enough to travel, the calf is described as being carried **nungkanda-wukungka** or 'with her (the mother's) back', and a number of older hunters speak of baby dugong swimming beneath their mothers for protection. This they call **nungkanda-wurdula**, or 'with her (the mother's) stomach'.

a-ayarra - Cow with a small calf. The calf is called **ngumba**. The term **ayarra** is also a term used to describe a human mother and child or a child with its mother's sister. If a large number of cows with small calves is seen, then the term is changed to **li-alayarra**, which has the same meaning as the above, but it indicates plural.

a-ngarninybala - Cow with a large calf. The calf is said to be somewhat independent of its mother, so she is said to talk to it so as to keep in contact with it. The root of this term is **ngarniny**, which is the root of the verb to reply or answer. There has been some debate amongst Western biologists as to whether dugongs do communicate with each other. The Yanyuwa cite evidence of the 'whistlers', but also believe that dugong have their own language.

a-mirramba - A non-lactating cow with a large calf still in her company. Yanyuwa men insist that from observation in the water they can determine this kind of dugong, saying they rely on the size of the accompanying calf. Hunters check the mammary glands of such a dugong during the butchering process, which may indicate that confirmation of a particular dugong kind or type can occur once the dugong is out of the water. This term is also given to women of the Yanyuwa Rumburriya clan as a personal name associated with the Dugong Ancestral being.

a-lhumurrawiji - A pregnant cow with a large calf still following her. The stem of this word **lhumu** is probably related to the verb to 'pull or drag along'. Yanyuwa hunters say that the calf is reluctant to

leave its mother so she is forced to take it or 'drag' it along with her. The same verb stem is used to relate to the specific action of pulling a harpooned dugong alongside the boat.

a-bayawiji - A mature cow dugong which is not pregnant and has no calves with her.

a-banthamu - A mature cow dugong which is considered to be past reproduction. An old cow like this may also have erupted tusks.

Other Terms Relating to Dugong

ngumba is the Yanyuwa word for a dugong calf. In Yanyuwa there is a term **marrantharl** that means the young of certain animals which are helpless and require constant attention if they are to survive. Such animals as pups, joeys, chicks and human babies are called by this term; baby dugong, however, are not. Because they swim almost immediately, dive and surface, suckle milk and move off with their mother, they are not deemed helpless. The Yanyuwa believe the bond between the cow and dugong and calf is very strong.

nhabarl - Yanyuwa avoidance dialect word for dugong. It is also used by inland groups such as the Gudanji and Wambaya people as a general term for dugong and turtle.

yiwaji - Archaic Yanyuwa word for dugong. Often described as old island language.

kirrimantharra - Two dugong such as a cow and calf surfacing to breathe at the same time. A personal name **Kirrikathu** is derived from this term and can be given to male members of the Yanyuwa clan.

mukulinjayarra - Dugong surfacing to take a breath, the same term is given to a dugong who is seen feeding on the floating seagrass which gathers on the water's surface.

walijburrungkayarra - The action of a dugong turning swiftly away if it senses danger or when in contests with other males during mating.

wirlibungkayarra - Term given when dugong leaps nearly bodily from the water, especially during mating contests or sometimes when surprised during hunting or after they have been harpooned. The same term is used to describe the leaping of dolphins and breaching of whales.

wakumantharra - The flogging of a dugong tail on the water to give warning and also used to describe the action of male dugong as they chase a female



Yukuvi (Clarkson Point) Vanderlin Island.
Steve Johnston butchering a dugong as a part of scientific research into dugong health but also as an important Yanyuwa dietary component.

during mating, and often to the actual process of mating.

The preceding discussion of special nouns used to describe dugong demonstrates the difficulty in identifying Yanyuwa biological classification as a process that is separate from other aspects of Yanyuwa culture. Yanyuwa classification of dugong reflects Yanyuwa people's understanding of dugong 'Law'. In such a paradigm Yanyuwa classification should be viewed as a web of meaning used to identify animals, but also as a way of interpreting their place in the environment, their responsibilities and the nature of their interactions with humans.

Sea Turtles

As with dugong, the only true way to understand the Law or culture of the sea turtle is to understand and know the many names that are given to them. Within the Pellew Islands the following species of turtle can be found.

- (i) Green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)
- (ii) Flatback turtle (*Natator depressus*)
- (iii) Loggerhead turtle (*Carreta carreta*)

- (iv) Hawksbill turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
- (v) Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)
- (vi) Leatherback turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)

The Yanyuwa speak of the high intelligence of the dugong as it has keen hearing, but they consider its vision to be poor. The sea turtle, however, is considered to have excellent vision above and below water, while the Yanyuwa attribute it with poor auditory skills.

Of all the turtle species the green turtle is the most commonly seen and the most often hunted, while it is the eggs of the flatback turtle that are most commonly gathered. Unlike the dugong, the Yanyuwa do not consider the sea turtle to be an animal that is a truly social being; they consider that the only reason sea turtles come together is because of the food they need to eat. This comment really only relates to the green turtle, which is predominantly a seagrass and algae feeder. The fact that the females lay their eggs and then leave them is another indicator of their anti-communal behaviour. One old man commented in a derisive tone that the only time sea turtles like each other was when 'that

boy one look about for girl turtle, big mob boy like that one girl' (Tim Rakawurima 1989), a reference either to seeing two or three males pursuing a single female, or to more than one male resting on top of the single male that is mating. However, the above comments are considered to be the way of the turtle; it is their Law, their culture, which only turtles will ever really understand, and which the Yanyuwa people can only explain from their observations and the Law that they possess in relation to this creature. There is no perceived close relationship at a general level with the turtle as there is with the dugong, although of course it is a major Ancestral being for the Wurdaliya clan. However, like the dugong, the sea turtle has an extensive vocabulary associated with it, which does highlight that the Yanyuwa have a complex conceptual classification for the species of turtle that exist in the area of the Pellew Islands.

The terms given to the sea turtle, as with the dugong, were originally thought to be adjectives, but on further analysis of the way they were used in speech it became obvious that they were considered as nouns, and that, as with the dugong, the Yanyuwa were talking about 'kinds' of sea turtle. This is especially in relation to the green turtle. The classification of turtles and the use of specific terms are, after the dugong, the most complex in Yanyuwa classification.

As with the dugong, Yanyuwa men and women have been at pains to make sure that the names be put down and understood for the different kinds of sea turtle that existed. This system being somewhat easier to follow because it relies more on the particular species and obvious physical differences.

As was mentioned above, a general term for sea turtle is either *walya*, a term shared with the dugong, or *wukulkuthu walya*, meaning 'short walya'. The most common term to describe any species of sea turtle or any "kind" of sea turtle is *wundanyuka*, or *yundanyuka*, which is a Marra language loan. The rest of the terms are given below.

liyarabi - Pacific olive ridley. This term was recorded from a single sighting off the west coast of West Island. The hunters were most insistent that it was neither a flatback, loggerhead, hawksbill nor green turtle. They gave the above term for the turtle, saying that it was sometimes seen around the islands, but it really liked to inhabit deep water. The roundness and colour of the shell are given as the prime indicators of this species. This recording was made in 1981; further questioning about this species has resulted in similar information as provided above. No one has been able to confirm whether or

not this species nests on the islands, and older men and women were reluctant to give it a clan classification, although most agreed it was probably Wurdaliya as that is what most other sea turtles were.

limarrwurrirri / kalumaluwardma - loggerhead turtle. This turtle is occasionally seen around reefs and sometimes even around the mouths of the rivers that flow into the Gulf. The Yanyuwa say that it was occasionally hunted, but only the oldest of the hunters, those over 50, could ever remember one being taken. The Yanyuwa say that this turtle eats such things as crabs, trepang, shellfish and sometimes seagrass, but only the seagrass from the reefs.

It is noted that the term for loggerhead is composed of the stem *wurrirri* which can mean mature, well developed or very big. This turtle is the only species not associated with the Wurdaliya clan; instead, it is considered an Ancestral being of the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya clan. Why this turtle has a different clan classification than other species has never been explained; people say that it is 'just the way it is'. However, one old man suggested that because its head was so big and that it was often seen far out to sea, floating on the surface, it may be a 'little bit like a rainbow'. (The Rainbow Serpent is a being that is predominantly associated with the Mambaliya-Wawukarriya semi-moiety). Another more surprising view put forth by this informant was that, unlike other sea turtles, the loggerhead made nests for its eggs under water. He stated that when submerged these turtles made a lot of 'dust' with their flippers, and this was the turtle in the process of making a nest. Such an activity, this informant concluded, was another factor in making this turtle species rainbow-like, as Rainbow Serpents are said to dwell in the mud under the sea and create 'nests'. (Ginger Bunaja 1982).

The term, **limarrwurrirri**, is also used for a turtle that can only be assumed to be a leatherback. It is always described as being huge, not very often seen, and 'just too big' to be hunted. Steve Johnston of Vanderlin Island stated that very rarely a leatherback turtle may be seen near the northern most reefs of the Pellews or near the sand bars at the mouth of Fat Fellows Creek to the south of Vanderlin Island. It is also sometimes seen just off the beaches in the area of sea running east away from the Pellew Islands towards the mouth of the Robinson and Calvert Rivers. There have also been some reports of this turtle species having been seen in the Bing Bong area, where the turtle was described as being 'big as the boat with a head like a bucket' (Mussolini Harvey 1982).

karrubu - hawksbill turtle
a-ngurrin - female hawksbill
yibarriwuna - male hawksbill

The first and foremost feature which the Yanyuwa mention in relation to the hawksbill turtle is that it is **wardingalki**, or one whose 'essence is bad'. The Yanyuwa consider this turtle to be poisonous.

Generally speaking, it is the older men and women who speak about this turtle with any degree of authority. Most of the younger men, in an age group from mid-40s downwards, have seen one or two of them in their lifetime, while others have never seen one. Those that are seen are usually as a result of harpooning, where they are released immediately.

wirndiwirndi - flatback turtle
a-karninja - female flatback turtle
dilhali - male flatback turtle

The Yanyuwa say that the flatback turtle is an eater of trepang, crabs and some species of seagrass which grow on reefs. It is said that the high meat content in their diet makes their flesh 'stringy', greasy and not very palatable, and that they 'taste like fish'.

It is also only the older people who have spoken of harpooning and eating these turtles, and they have only spoken of doing so in the more northerly regions of the islands. Most of the people under the age of 50 with whom Bradley has spoken have never seen an adult flatback and are not familiar with the Yanyuwa terms for this species. One or two younger men have harpooned a flatback, but on the advice of older hunters they have released them, though two were brought back to camp in the 1980s to 'show' people, and they were cooked and eaten. Hatchlings are sometimes caught in the sea by children who immediately call them green turtles. The eggs of this species are still gathered and savoured.

malurrba / kudabi - green turtle
a-tharra - female green turtle
a-wandangumara - very large female green turtle
warrikuliyangu/warrikkundayangu
- male green turtle
bankiba - very large male green turtle

For the Yanyuwa the green turtle is the species with which they are most familiar. It is the most commonly seen turtle species around the islands, and during a period from 1980 to 1993 98% of the turtles taken were of this species, the remaining 2% represents very rare flat back captures (Bradley 1997).

The following terms also relate to green turtles, but they have more to do with whether the turtle is considered suitable for eating:

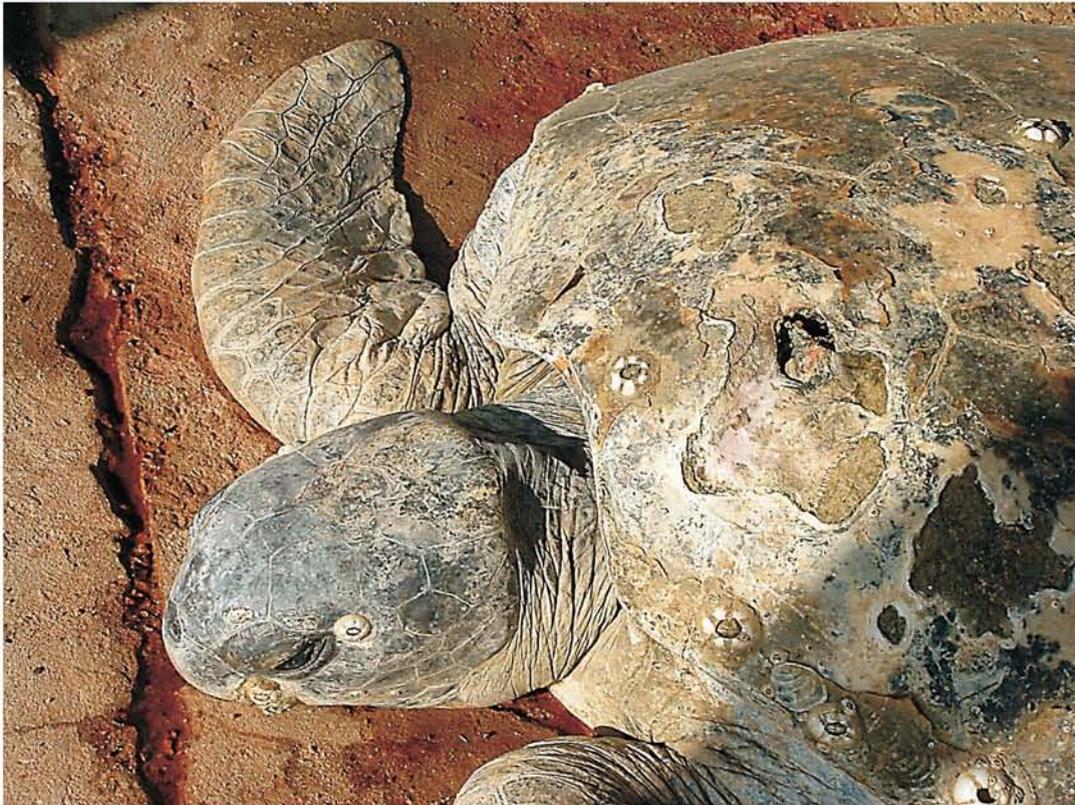
lijalijangulyanda - green turtle that is not big enough to eat, of a size where perhaps two men could easily carry it.

ngajilingajili - young green turtle with a lot of pale, yellow colouring, not eaten.

wurrukijbulungu - immature green turtle, where sex cannot yet be distinguished. This term, when used, invokes in people the care that must be taken when cooking the turtle. They say that a green turtle with such a classification has a thin shell which could easily be burnt through.

ngarrangarra - large green turtle which when caught is felt to be low in fat content. This is usually ascertained by feeling the area near the neck and shell of the turtle, or in the region where the flipper joins the body. If the hunter feels the turtle is not fat enough it will be released. The term **ngarrangarra** literally means 'angry because one is in poor spirits or health', it is commonly translated as 'cheeky', meaning that it is 'not happy' because it is not fat. Such finds always cause Yanyuwa people to address and take stock of their country, and to ask questions as to what has happened that may cause animals not to be fat. These comments often dwell on moral components of group behaviour as well as individual responsibility for the maintenance of land. Again this term has relevance to issues to be raised below.

wunakathangu - large sea turtles in very poor condition, which on butchering are found to have ulcerations in the stomach, no fat. On two occasions Bradley has seen large female turtles captured which have been in terribly poor condition. On one occasion, the shell of the turtle was so brittle that the harpoon broke right through the shell and tore through the turtle's lung. When these turtles were butchered prior to cooking, they were found to contain little seagrass in their stomachs and intestines. What sea grass was present was in slurry form, as opposed to the tightly packed mass usually encountered, though there was heavy impacted black mass in the lower intestines. The normal rich yellow fat lining the intestinal membranes and the green fat lining the shell were barely present. On opening the stomachs of the turtles, large black ulcerations were found. On both occasions the turtles were not eaten but were burnt along with all the internal organs. The term **wunakathangu** is also a name which can be given to male members of the Wurdaliya clan for whom the green turtle is a major Ancestral being. Again, as with the **ngarrangarra** turtles this discussion has relevance to the discussion that appear below.



Ngarrangarra / Wunakathangu, a sea turtle in poor health

a-wathawayawiji - female turtle that when butchered is found to contain unlaidd eggs or egg follicles. The Yanyuwa consider these a delicacy.

The green turtle is the most commonly seen, primarily because its main food source is seagrass. It therefore inhabits the seagrass beds that follow the coast of the gulf, an area most frequented by Yanyuwa hunters.

Other vocabulary associated with the sea turtles is given below.

jardiwangarni - nesting sea turtle

rri-bankuja - mating sea turtles

na-wiyaji - female sea turtle when mating

li-wirnkuja - large numbers of nesting turtles on a beach. Again it is noted that the use of the plural marking prefix **li** - , normally reserved for use on human subjects and dugong, is used here for turtles. Again, it is probably giving emphasis to the act of nesting.

Yanyuwa terms for sea turtle eggs and hatchlings are listed below.

a-wathawaya - unlaidd eggs or egg follicles.

na-munga - nest.

wujbi - egg.

makuliji - fresh eggs no sign of embryo.

wulungumilka - egg containing a partly developed embryo.

wulungu - egg with a fully developed embryo.

yabarlarla - turtle hatchlings.

ruju / rujurru - small immature turtles seen at sea, bigger than hatchlings

ngululurru - young male or female green turtle, 'saucer to dinner plate' sized green turtles often seen on the fringing reefs on the east coast of Vanderlin Island. This is a generic term because sex differentiation cannot usually be distinguished.

It is worth noting also the Yanyuwa predation of sea turtle eggs is very low. There are many beaches that the Yanyuwa know as rookery sites (see Map) but few of them are now visited with the intent to take eggs. There are three primary reasons for this:

- (i) There is no longer a large population of Yanyuwa people constantly moving across the islands, thus many rookery areas may not be visited for periods of years.
- (ii) People are concerned about the future of sea turtles in the area of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands. The dramatically increased cases of sea turtle 'sickness' has meant that people see nesting sea turtles and their eggs, and hopefully hatchlings, as a the future populations of healthy sea turtles.
- (iii) There are some beaches that are still under very restricted access because of the presence of important sites. The beach to the immediate west of the Red Bluff (**Wulibirra**) on North Island is one of these.

Midway Comments

This report has spent quite a considerable time documenting Yanyuwa information about seagrass, dugong and sea turtle because they are at the forefront of their concerns. The concerns are not just to do with the seagrass environments and the dugong and sea turtle as biological entities, their concerns are also to do with what they perceive as a general non-indigenous ignorance concerning the species and a lack of understanding of how important they are to the Yanyuwa families associated with the sea and island country.

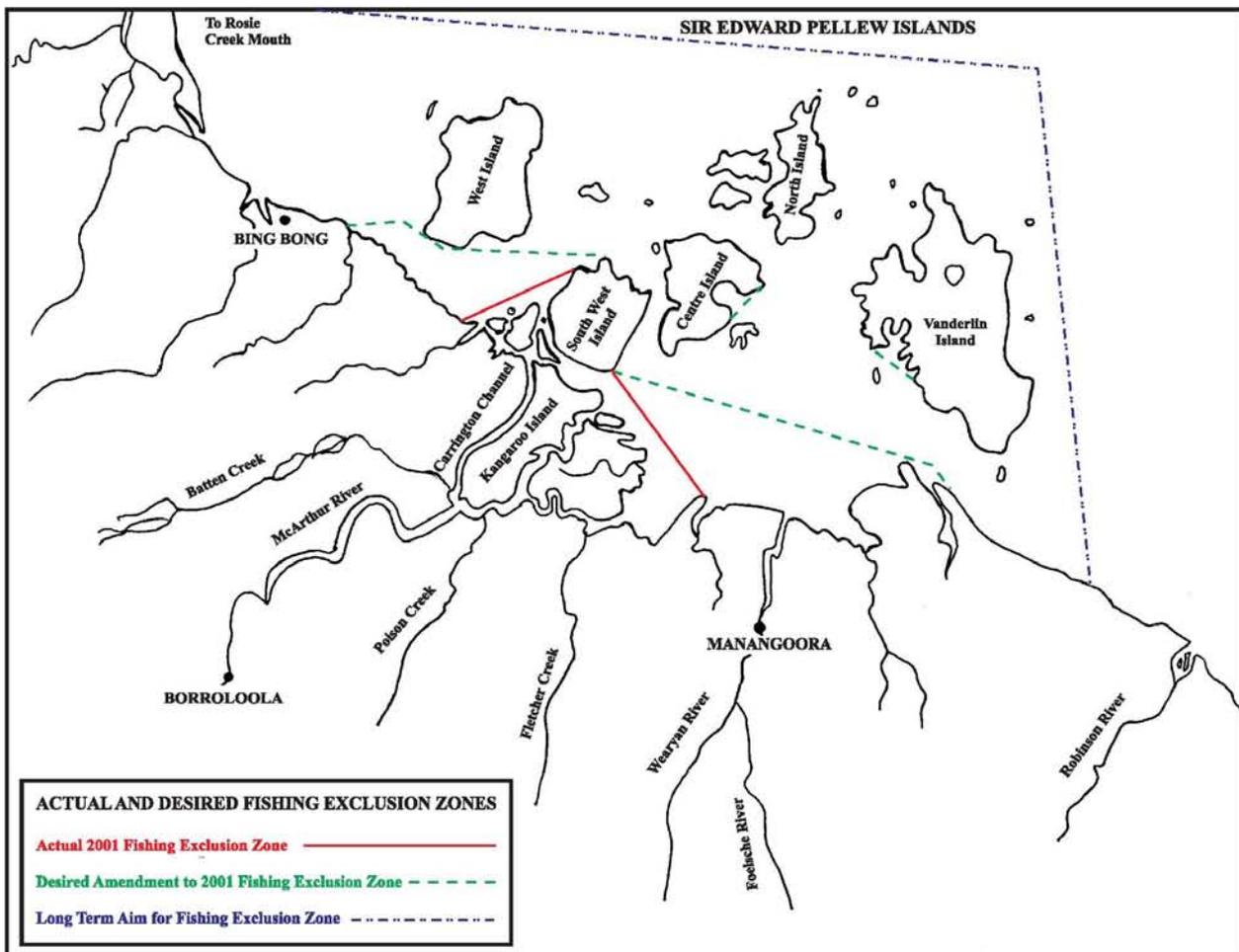
Empirical observations by many Yanyuwa people also suggest that there are serious concerns associated with the seagrass, dugong and sea turtle. The following information is an overview of those concerns. While I have divided the issues under separate headings, many of them are closely interrelated and demonstrate the depth of concern that Yanyuwa people have for their saltwater country.

Fishing Exclusion Zone

In 2001 the Northern Territory Government closed off the whole of the McArthur River system (including the Carrington Channel, Crooked River

and Channel). The line of closure presently runs from Amos Point (**Wukarrala**) on the south eastern tip of South West Island to the northern tip of Sharker Point (**Jarrka**). The second line runs from the north west tip of South West Island (**Ndaya**) to an area just west of the Davies Channel mouth known in Yanyuwa as **Wubulinyarrangka** (see Map). While the Yanyuwa families associated with the islands and sea acknowledge that this had indeed helped protect the dugong and marine turtle, they believe that the lines must be extended to include other important areas of seagrass and dugong and sea turtle habitat. They would like to see the exclusion zone that begins on the south eastern tip of South West Island (**Mukarrala**) brought from that point, running eastwards, take in that area known as the mudbank (**Nungkumarraa**) and come down on the sand bar on the eastern bank of Fat Fellows Creek (**Milrila**) (see Map).

The line of exclusion on the western side they would like to run from the tip of the peninsula on the central north coast of South West Island (**Lilumuthumula**) across to Crocodile Point (**Mamadathamburru**) on the south west tip of West Island down to the western bank of the mouth of Mule Creek (**Yawurrangka**) (see Map).



These changes to the exclusion zone are driven by what the Yanyuwa families see are the rapidly changing nature of the environment in the area and their fear for the protection of species that they consider to be important. The initial meetings concerning the closure zones were a site of tension for the Yanyuwa people involved and even then people were concerned that the zones were too small as the major sea grass beds at the mouth of the Wearyan River and the area known as Salt Bay to the east of the Wearyan mouth were still not included; similarly the sea grass beds and reefs to the west of

South West Island were not included. A sense for some of the general feeling at that time can be heard in the translated quote of a senior land owner for South West Island at the end of this page.

There is a general sentiment that eventually the Yanyuwa families would like to see all of the islands and sea as a protected area, beginning at Sandy Head (**Liwirndirndila**) going north and then west, and encompassing all of the islands, and then coming back onto the mainland again on the northern part of the Rose Creek mouth (**Warrawarda**) (see Map).



Remains of a dugong at **Wurruwiji**, Bing Bong.
'...their bones are on the beaches and in the mangroves of our country...'
(Dinah Norman Marrngawi)

We don't want the map, we want the fishermen out of this country, let them go somewhere else, I am tired of the dugong being killed, we no longer want to talk about the map, we have no need of the map, we can tell the fishermen where to go... Out!... Away! Take the map away, the line is too close to sacred places on my country, too close to our country, the country of our ancestors where they hunted and followed the Law of the sea. This dugong truly I will tell you it is a proper man, it has big Law, white men should leave it alone, they stand in complete ignorance of such matters...these fishermen they kill the dugong, the smell of the dead dugong is all over our country, their bones are on the beaches and in the mangroves of our country, enough I cannot say anymore my stomach burns with shame.
(Dinah Norman Marrngawi 2001)

The Yanyuwa families on Vanderlin Island would like to see all the small bays and quays on the western side of the island closed. Such requests of course raise important issues of legality. All of the islands have been found to be the traditional lands of the Yanyuwa families under the *Land Rights (NT) Act 1976*. The exception to this is North Island which is now Barranyi National Park; in the first land claim Traditional Owners were recognised but the land grant was not given. Thus all of the islands, with the exception of North Island are Aboriginal land, as are the sea grass beds running from the mouth of the Robinson River to Home Creek at Bing Bong. A delay in the returning of the title to the Yanyuwa people has meant continued anxiety and frustration. In addition, entry onto such land requires that non-Yanyuwa visitors should require permits to travel on any of the islands to the low tide mark. This has never been the case. As one senior land owner commented:

Everyone in this country, black and white follows white law. If we make a mistake off to court and might be jail, but white people have no respect for Yanyuwa Law, even when we fought in the courts, they have no respect, they do not care, how would you say it? We Yanyuwa people are not equal partners on our own country, we are low down and the white people are high up...how is that?
(Annie Karrakayn 2005)

These are issues that constantly fill the minds of many Yanyuwa people; tied into such comments are also concerns about sacred sites and other areas of significance on the islands and in the sea. Ultimately Yanyuwa families maintain the contact with their island and sea country regardless of the western legal status of the land as that is, as they see it, their responsibility.

Concern for the Dugong and Sea Turtle
“The Dugong and Sea Turtles have sickness now” (Jemima Miller, 2005)

One of the most critical observations made by the Yanyuwa families associated with the sea and islands has been the increase in very sick sea turtles and dugong and an accompanying increase in mortality. There could be any number of reasons as to why this is the case, but the discussions concerning these issues by the Yanyuwa people is intense and filled with both concern and at times anger.

Generally the first signs of this “sickness” were the appearance of large numbers of sea turtles which were floating on the surface of the sea; they were unable to dive. The real concern was the numbers in one day in April 2003 when nine turtles were found in this condition and reports came in from other parts of the islands speaking of the same issues. At the same time and continuing into the present the number of dead turtles found rotting or the skeletal remains are now a common site along the beaches and in the mangroves around the islands.



Dead sea turtle, *Wurruwiji*, Bing Bong

When these turtles are captured they are found to be very skinny, and when butchered there is very little fat. The normal thick green fat lining the shell is black; the rich fat lining the intestines and muscles of the turtles is found to be in a very poor condition or nearly non-existent. The stomach and intestines instead of being filled with thickly packed sea grass and faeces are found to contain a slurry or jelly-like mixture often with a thick black substance blocking the lower intestine. As discussed above, turtles in such condition are known from the past, and are called in Yanyuwa *ngarrangarra* - 'having little fat' or *wunakathangu* - a term given to turtle that when butchered carries all of the signs described above. However the presence of such large numbers of sick and dying turtles has no precedence in either Yanyuwa oral history or contemporary history of the area.

In addition, it is generally believed that the rate of turtles nesting on the islands is also falling. People speak of areas where turtles nearly 'nested on top of each other' having only a few nests. No one knows what is happening and at best people are left to guess. Among the more commonly discussed issues are:

- Starvation - large wet season floods carry heavy deposits of a soil from upstream; this covers the seagrass and the seagrass dies because it needs sunlight to create photosynthesis. There are questions as to whether the soil content of the flood waters has increased because of soil erosion and soil degradation caused by the pastoral industry. Such soil may also carry with it chemicals that are used in the cattle industry.
- Poisoning - the presence of the mine port at Bing Bong has since its building always been of concern to the Yanyuwa people. They worry that some of ore body that is carried from the mine site to the port and then on the barges to awaiting ships may be going into the sea and either killing the seagrass, or the dust from the ore body is entering the ecosystem and being ingested by the sea turtles.
- Ingestion of marine debris (especially plastic bags).
- Turtle are also killed and injured when the Aburri barge manoeuvres itself at the Bing Bong Port. The turtles are feeding in the narrow channel at the port and are hit by the thrusters and propellers of the barge as it docks at the ore offloading station. Dead turtle are now quite common along the area of foreshore near the port site, in Yanyuwa this area is named **Wurruwiji**.
- There have been some instances of sea turtles being used as bait by the crab fishermen.

In relation to dugong the discussions are equally complex. There has been a long history of dugong death in this area, and while the present closure line has gone some way in helping the situation there are still issues which the Yanyuwa people feel need addressing.

- Dugong are also being found sick and dead on beaches in the region, in numbers unlike ever before. Dugong carcasses are being found in the port area and are seen to be the direct result of strikes by the Aburri barge.
- The dugong herds are much smaller than they used to be. Yanyuwa observers believe that the increased boat traffic from crabbers and tourists crisscrossing the seagrass beds drives the dugong away from their feeding grounds, as well as breaking up the herds.
- There have been observations by Yanyuwa hunters where they have noticed a direct correlation between the activities of the crab fishermen in their boats, as they cross the seagrass beds, whereby they observe dugong coming into feed at high tide, but return to the deep water when the boat crosses the seagrass, when the boat passes the dugong come back in to start feeding, only to be driven back when the boat returns. This is a regular pattern and as a result the dugong have very disturbed feeding patterns.
- Seagrass damage has been observed where the crab fishermen are constantly using the same path over the seagrass beds, and large areas of seagrass are missing from the areas where the crab pots are anchored.
- Seagrass decline was also raised as an issue, and people spoke of a number of areas where seagrass was once common where there is now none or a much decreased presence. People describe areas as once being like 'lawns'.
- The Yanyuwa are also concerned about the increased rhetoric from government agencies and marine biologists that appear to blame dugong and sea turtle decline on Indigenous hunting. However, dugong harvest rates in this area of the Gulf are not high.
- The desired extension of the fishing exclusion zone is in direct response to a perception that increased traffic in the area is affecting the dugong populations.

In regard to the seagrass beds and dugong and sea turtle populations, the Yanyuwa people would like to assist in a full scale study of the area that covers both what they feel are the social and biological factors that may be contributing to the illness that is being observed, the dramatic increase in deaths as well as the observed changes to the seagrass beds.



Terns (*bangantha*) in flight at *Jarrulunma* (Hervey Rocks), in the background can be seen *Wulibirra* (Red Bluff) on North Island.

Other Animals, Fish and Birds

In a Yanyuwa understanding of the environment all living things have value and are a part of the complex matrix of relationship of people to place and things that is subsumed under the general term of Law.

While people express concern for the dugong and sea turtle they are also worried about the other living things that they share their country with. Nearly all indigenous species of plants, mammals, fish and birds are recorded in the song lines that crisscross Yanyuwa country (see Yanyuwa families et. al 2003). Animals such as the various kangaroo species, possums and bandicoots and rock wallabies, for example, are important species within the understanding of Yanyuwa Law, as are fish species such as Tiger and Hammerhead Sharks, Groper, Barracuda, Black Bream, Salmon and Barramundi. In relation to the Barramundi, the Yanyuwa have a detailed knowledge of the life cycle of this species. The small immature barramundi, *lakuyariku*, live in the sea, they then travel upriver to the freshwater and are sometimes washed by floods into nearby lagoons; at this time the barramundi is called *lhunduba*. Later the fish travel back downstream and are called *rdiwabi*. They are now nearing full maturity and the term *wurrirri* is used, which means fully grown. The barramundi then live in the sea and saltwater stretches of the rivers and the very big specimens that are sometimes caught are called *wirumburrangu*.

Likewise the birds species of the coastal regions, sea and islands are also important; many species of birds are not only important in Law but are also considered to play an active part in maintaining the health of the coastal country. The Chestnut Rail, *a-Alanthaburra* for example is said to 'keep the country up' that is to constantly emotionally engage with it by calling out. As a generic group the sea birds are often described as being *nyiki-nganji arlkuwu* or 'being kin to the fish', or often a longer phrase is used *ndiya wurralngu nyiki-nganji ki-arlkuwu yurrngumantha* or '(the sea birds) they are inhabitants of the saltwater country, they are kin to the fish for ever'. This is a quite pervasive sentiment and Old Tim Timothy in 1984 expressed his sentiments about the sea bird in the following way:

They are spearing fish, inside the water. They are spearing fish and bringing them out from the water. They bear them in their mouths. The fish flay around. The birds eat the fish alive, yes, it is this way they eat the fish that flay around in their stomachs. These birds of the sea they are not like those of the inland regions, they are different, alone, these ones that are inhabitants of the saltwater they are kin to the fish for all time.

The key word in any of this discussion is *nganji* or *kin*, people stress the relationship of birds to fish as one of kinship; they believe that without the fish there would be no sea birds. This expression is a way

in which the Yanyuwa speak of symbiotic relationships, of notions of co-dependency and the predator-prey relationship. To see many birds over the sea country is to know that the country is well; as one person commented, 'They hold the country up when there are no people present' (Una Harvey 2005). Even the smallest of species can be seen to be important as the following comment illustrates:

We hear the call of the red capped plover and we know she is holding all of the sea country, we know that the country is good, in the old days the old people would hear her call and they would acknowledge her, they would call out to her in the following manner, 'Yes, you are there, dweller of the coastal country, allow us to harpoon a dugong, a turtle, allow us to take a fish, make the country good.
(Annie Karrakayn 1992)

What becomes important, then, is that while this report may not have concentrated on the other diverse wildlife that can be found over the island of the Yanyuwa saltwater country this is not to diminish their importance, and people are concerned for all the living things on their country (see Bradley et. al 2005).

Kilu-ngabunjama The terns dive into the sea
Wunjurrkunjurr the vast open expanse of the ocean

li-walamakamakala they belong with the sea country
kumba-jajirra they are the ones that dive into the depths of the sea.
(Song composed by Jack Baju)

Crabbers and Fishermen

'They're like a mob of pelicans...only they're killing the country' (Johnny Johnston 2005)

There was a lot of discussion concerning the crabbers that operate through the delta regions of the McArthur River, the Wearyan River and Fat Fellows Creek. There are two main responses. The first is to get rid of all crabbers, to close the whole area under discussion and let the crab population recover from what people consider to be unsustainable take numbers. Other people believe that they should be allowed to stay but they must be much more heavily monitored and policed. There was a general agreement, however, amongst all people that they should only be allowed to take male crab of the correct size, and that it should be made illegal to capture female crabs. Many people also believed that the crabber should be made to take away the debris of their occupation sites. There is no easy way to decide how to move with the crabbers as some Yanyuwa people have developed close relationships with them and value their help in times of need when travelling around the islands and the systems. However, there is a general agreement that there needs to be much tighter monitoring.



Abandoned crabbers camp at *Wurrwinkarra* in the Davies Channel



Larladula (King Ash Bay) Tourist vehicles parked in the boat ramp car park.

Yanyuwa people acknowledge that since the first fisheries closures there has been an increase in the number of fish and the variety of species in the rivers. As mentioned above, people would like see the exclusion zone increased and only to allow hand line and rod fishing in the area of the Pellew Islands.

The development of King Ash Bay (**Larladula**) as a permanent settlement on the banks of the McArthur River is also a point of debate. While some Yanyuwa people value the close proximity of the shop to their homes on the islands, the development in itself has put additional strain on river systems, coast and islands.

Amongst some of the old Yanyuwa people there is a sense of shame and anger that the area has been developed. Historically the area of the river inhabited by King Ash Bay Fishing Club (**Larladula**) and the Landing (**Jawuma**) were important dry season camping places, and there is a sense of that history and the memory of the old people who stayed there being somehow overwritten by the increased population that at its peak extends down to Batten Point (**Lhuka**). There have also been observations of up to 47 boats in the Wearyan River mouth and on the same day 51 boats in the area of the Crooked River mouth.

An example of the kind of frustration that Yanyuwa people feel about the place is the following story that was constantly told by many people. This story is

indicative of the kind of attitudes that the Yanyuwa people see as being so offensive.

That old lady she was there fishing on the river bank. She caught a shark and she was there cooking it when that 'whitefella' from the fishing club came and said to her, 'If you want to stay here you will have to pay fifty dollars'. That old lady told him to f...k off, it was her country too.

(Thelma Douglas 2005)

While people laugh about such stories there is an underlying sense of powerlessness in relation to how to control movements over the rivers, seagrass beds, sea and islands. This is compounded by the fact that the Yanyuwa have on three separate occasions been proven to be the owners of the islands and sea, and yet the fishermen and crabbers ignore these findings and continue to travel where ever they wish without concern. There was also an opinion among the middle aged and younger Yanyuwa people that an attitude of belligerence was not going to win over the fishermen and tourists, but rather a concerted effort to share information was one approach that should be tried. In relation to these issues a number of points were raised.

- Fishermen should pay for permission to fish and crab in the area. Each individual person who fishes should have to buy a permit. This money could be used to continue the support of the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Rangers.

- Informative sign posts, pamphlets and booklets should be developed that explain the historical and cultural significance of the sea and Pellew Islands to the Yanyuwa people.
- Interested visitors to the area could be taken on tours of the islands by Yanyuwa owners and some camping could be allowed, for a fee, on areas of Kangaroo Island and other negotiated areas on the islands.
- A study should be undertaken of fishermen numbers and where they are most likely to travel to, so that key areas of interest by the fishermen can be constantly monitored.

Tourists and Travellers

'They just rape the country' (Warren Timothy 2005)

As with many other conversations with Yanyuwa families over development on their country, there are often quite strong opinions one way or the other. Tourism is one of these topics.

Tourism really began in Borroloola in the early 1980s and at that time it was mainly observable by people camping at the Burketown Crossing (Warralungku) and infrequent arrival of large tour buses. Over the next decades the numbers of people increased, but the nature of their interest in the area changed from the traveller interested in the 'outback' to the fisherman after sport.

When tourists became a permanent feature on country the Yanyuwa called theirs, the Yanyuwa described them as 'strangers who were shutting up the country', or 'people without faces'. At the same time the Yanyuwa also noticed an increase in the presence of rubbish being left over the country, boats and hunting equipment being stolen, the carcasses of 'non-desirable' fish species being left on riverbanks and beaches, as well as an increase to the disturbance of important sites on the islands that hold culturally significant material.

As a response to these observations, some people may believe that tourism may offer some potential to the various Yanyuwa families. Already there is very successful controlled tourism on Vanderlin Island, where the aim is low impact and only those people known to the families on the island are welcome to come and use the facilities that have been developed. One of the families associated with South West Island would also like to develop low key unobtrusive tourism and is working slowly and carefully towards this development; another family on Kangaroo Island would like to work towards a

similar low key kind of tourism. Generally the key issues raised about tourism development are:

- There should be no camping on any of the islands without the permission of the correct Yanyuwa families.
- There should also be a right for Yanyuwa families to refuse entry onto any of the islands.
- Tourism should be kept small and low key, under the control of Yanyuwa families with no 'middle people involved'.
- There should be a sign-in system where tourists leave their names and addresses in a central location.
- The area of West Neck (Lalawura) on Centre Island is being used as a common toilet by visitors to the islands. The area is covered in toilet paper and faeces. There perhaps needs to be toilets built at certain places. People are concerned about the run off from such activities.

As with issues discussed above in relation to Crabbers and Fishermen there should also be the development of signposts, pamphlets and booklets that will educate the tourists as to the value of the country they are visiting.

General Issues

Generally people are deeply concerned for the future integrity of the sea and island as well as the river systems. It is worth noting here that even though the river systems may not be technically 'sea country' they are the 'highways' by which all people reach the sea. The Yanyuwa do not differentiate between the sea and the rivers and are equally concerned for the changes they see happening along the rivers, such as increased erosion causing the mangrove systems to collapse as well as an increase in rubbish.

It is not only the dugong and sea turtle that are seen to be affected; stingray numbers are said to have declined, as well as other crab species such as soldier and swimmer crabs, and jellyfish, which were once a seasonal feature of the coastal environment are no longer seen in the large number of the past. In addition to this, fish die-offs have increased over the islands, with one line of dead fish extending from near the southern end of Vanderlin island and far along the area of the north western coastline; again there are no oral traditions that speak of such things. Many of these comments reflect years and years of observations on behalf of the Yanyuwa families that travel the sea and islands.

One of the other important issues that people really wish to explore is the re-education of their youth,

who feel both alienated from the white world but also from the land of their ancestors. The old people know that the years of living at Borroloola has caused serious issues which have affected their children; they would like to see a system where the Yanyuwa youth are brought back to their island country, where they are taught the value of the country and hopefully in so doing give the youth pride in their identity. This is an important issue, and people spoke of the need to develop learning materials for the youth as well that complement any physical experience on the islands and sea.

Concluding Comments

This report has been written at the time of critical junctions for the both the Yanyuwa people and the sea and islands that they call home. There are events happening on the islands and sea, such as the death of dugong and sea turtles and other environmental changes, that deserve attention; in the same way the Yanyuwa people are living through times of intense and rapid social change.

Many of the Yanyuwa people who have helped put this report together know only too well of the grief and sadness of untimely deaths of young kin caused by the destructive violence induced by alcohol and other drugs of addiction. They are only too aware of the issues inherent in diseases such as hypertension and diabetes and other health problems, let alone the death of older people who take with them prodigious knowledge about Yanyuwa country.

This report attempts to tell an intimate story of why country is strong and of the spirit that lives there. It would be wrong to romanticise and exoticise the information that is given in this report; there are issues raised in this report with far reaching, challenging political agendas.

As the old people die, those people remaining search out other ways to keep memories alive; this report seeks to explore some of these issues so that younger people are not the inheritors of memories that have no substance and meaning. There is an urgency in the voice of the older people that contributed to this report to make Yanyuwa youth aware of the spiritual and biological entities that inhabit the Yanyuwa environment, and to give to them the ability to both read and listen to their country, both land and the sea.

Today, a question of continuing relevance to the Yanyuwa at Borroloola is how can the past be used to reaffirm their identity in the present and the future? An important part of Yanyuwa identity is based upon their attachment to the sea and the traditions of hunting dugong and sea turtle, and attachment to many places on the islands and mainland. However, the contemporary experience of the Yanyuwa has meant a constant re-evaluation and ongoing construction in negotiating their lives in response to

each other and their wider community. Such negotiations with their core body of Yanyuwa Law has to take into account issues associated with living in an open town where the Yanyuwa are fast becoming a minority, issues associated with language loss, western trends in education, and having country swallowed up into pastoral and mining leases and tourist enterprises.

Yanyuwa residences in the township of Borroloola and indeed even the larger outstation settlements are viewed by many outsiders as grim, hateful places that are the source of constant rumour by outsiders who also see themselves as established locals. Such people, for example, despise and fear the kind of drinking and drunkenness that they see Yanyuwa men and women engage in but they fail to see it is culturally and psychologically very different from their own drunkenness or the drinking they associate with much larger urban centres, embedded as it is in intense colonial histories of dispossession and disempowerment.

The Yanyuwa do not deny that alcohol is a problem but they also know that many aspects of their lives are hidden away from the outside viewers, especially those aspects that are still highly valued. In people's homes, out bush, on the sea and islands things are hidden from critical, disapproving, ignorant moralistic eyes. The way the Yanyuwa use their land and sea is like nearly all other aspects of their Law little known by the outsider who still fails to recognise that environmental effects, good or bad, are inseparable from the social and individual well-being of a people whose economic, domestic and historical experiences and identity are still so focused on the land, sea and resources derived from their country. Still, however, reactions to more extreme events in the present day setting often involve bewilderment and pain. For example, what response is possible when sacred burial areas are violated in the most profound and disturbing manner, or when dugong are shot and mutilated by persons unknown, and the dugong remains are left to float and be washed up on beaches, and the stench of their death lays heavy on the coastal environment?

The Yanyuwa respond they have their own interpretations that they will keep within their community; but they will respond publicly, at the risk of being labelled ignorant and "shit stirrers" and they will draw upon the advice and assistance of outside authorities. In these instances their own authority based upon their Law has limited strength, this is especially the case when dealing with issues associated with environmental management and with species the West has categorised as endangered, such as dugong and sea turtle. There are issues in such debates for the Yanyuwa where their Law and newer contemporary knowledge must also be addressed and negotiated.

The Yanyuwa are still trying to deal with things that they see as abiding and crucial. There are tensions as the old and middle-aged people attempt to stress the abiding nature of their concerns to the younger people. As knowledge is being transmitted, it is being remoulded and adapted so that it has meaning and relevance to the young. These tensions were apparent in 1980. At that time the population of Yanyuwa people was such that there were a large number of old men and women, with a strong group of middle aged men and women who heavily influenced the young, and Yanyuwa was still the critical language of instruction.

Over the last two decades many deaths of old men and women, middle aged men and young adults have changed things profoundly and dramatically. Parts of this report are about what the Yanyuwa people call “strong things”, about Law and land and the way people, especially the few older people left, still see their country. The work, then, is about the value that these old people see in what could be called “spiritual power”. By engaging and contemplating this term it is possible to move beyond the more common trite views of Indigenous people being “at one with”, or “part of the environment”. For it is by the use of this spiritual power, controlled by the political intuitions of the **ngimarringki** and **jungkayi** that the Yanyuwa assume a far greater managerial role, in relation to their country, through actions and knowledge of Law. Thus, management of the country is not just for the good of the country at large, the plants, animals, spirit beings and people it sustains, but good management also reveals a web of interrelationships, and it these interwoven links between people and the country that underlies so much that is written in this report.

The inclusion of a Yanyuwa-centric management system can only be achieved if environmental or scientific knowledge is seen as part of contemporary Yanyuwa society and culture. An underlying and unstated theme of this report is that knowledge systems of the West are also an element of Yanyuwa Law, and is therefore a part of everyday social process; the li-Anthawirryarra Sea Rangers Unit is evidence of this.

One of the major issues facing the Yanyuwa people is who they are in the face of loss of autonomy. Loss of language and widespread social disruption, relocation, loss of access to once important tracts of land and the loss of good health are important issues, because the notion of **Yanyuwangala**, the essence of being Yanyuwa, includes access to and the negotiation of knowledge of and about their country, which is why so much of this report carries enormous hope for the Yanyuwa.

Yanyuwa management of their country are embedded in the daily pragmatics of life that speak of an environment inhabited by living and non-living things, humans and non-humans, all of which are sentient and have relationships to each other. In such a construction of the environment, people do not stand separate, but are rather elements of a complex web of invisible threads of connection in which no one aspect of the country has complete knowledge. All the sentient beings in Yanyuwa country give out information, their actions are messages, and other sentient beings take notice. In such an interconnected system the life of country is not seen as a series of random unconnected events; there are patterns and predictabilities based upon long-term observation and repositories of knowledge.



Hunting dugong and sea turtle

Information about how things are connected to each other, and what is supposed to happen in conjunction with what is important, becomes the basis and the discussion of the Law.

For Yanyuwa people their country is heavily enchanted; this is not meant in a light or fairy story kind of way. It is enchanted with a power that makes sense to those people born to Yanyuwa country. However, in our desire to 'understand' the country of the Yanyuwa we run the risk of disenchanting; our desire for reason and sense strips the country of the sacred and thus a process of disenchantment takes place. Such disenchantment leads to a loss of centre, because country and family become fragmented.

This report has tried to be aware of the power of this disenchantment that is all too often championed by the so-called rational West; those Yanyuwa men and women who have worked on this report have both rational and emotional needs and desires to continue the task of speaking about connected things and ideas. Yanyuwa families, living and non-living things, country and sea are interconnected and the links between them can become supercharged with meaning. The further back these connections go, the greater the meaning any one thing or group of things can have.

Over the last 100 years there has been dispossession and loss, repossession, presence and absence, reality and memory on Yanyuwa country. To be sure some Yanyuwa people have survived without their country, and the country can be said to have survived without the Yanyuwa, but the relationship has, at its most basic, always been permanent. Time has forged an indissoluble bond between country and people.

Prior to modern times Yanyuwa have never had a word for history, which seeks to retain an impersonal, exact record of past events. However, Yanyuwa have always had a word for remembering, which requires past events to be experienced from a personal perspective. Once people live through certain events, their significance becomes etched into their memories. It is this relationship to their Law that they have constantly sought to maintain. The power of knowing one's 'master story', the dominant details that give meaning to large and small moments alike, is that the story can never be relegated to the back of a historical bookshelf.

People, living and non-living things, country and song and narratives are the texts that are ultimately about memory and maintenance. Some of the information in this report provides concrete



Rangers Tom Simon(jnr), Damien Pracy and Graham Friday install phascogale (*rilikini*) boxes on West Island.

reminders of a powerful oral tradition that for generations have created threads into a fabric, some of which is now very damaged; the older Yanyuwa men and women know that these threads and the resultant fabric of Law is life sustaining. The consciousness of the Yanyuwa world is dependent on the continued existence of this fabric regardless of contemporary, radical and all too often tragic changes. The older generation knows that their

bodies and minds are composed of this fabric and that the meaning of life and death is inherent in it, and perhaps, just perhaps, the deepest knowledge they possess is to know what life is really all about. This report seeks to empower future generations of Yanyuwa people and land managers to understand the origins and very beginning pulses of Yanyuwa time so they can carry their hopes for their people and country into the future.



Scott Whiting and Ranger Tom Simon (jnr) prepare a tracking device prior to attaching to a flat back turtle.



Ranger Damien Pracy measures the shell length of a nesting flatback turtle (*wirndiwirndi*)



Sea turtle hatchling heads towards the sea. *Maabayny*, West Island.

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Based on the values, concerns and aspirations described in Part 2, we have developed Objectives, Strategies and Actions to address the following 9 key issues relating to the future management of Yanyuwa Sea Country:

1. Protected Areas
2. Fisheries Management
3. Protecting Yanyuwa Sites
4. Monitoring Sea Country
5. Communication
6. Tourism
7. Research
8. Dugong and Turtle Management
9. Implementation steps

Issue 1: PROTECTED AREAS

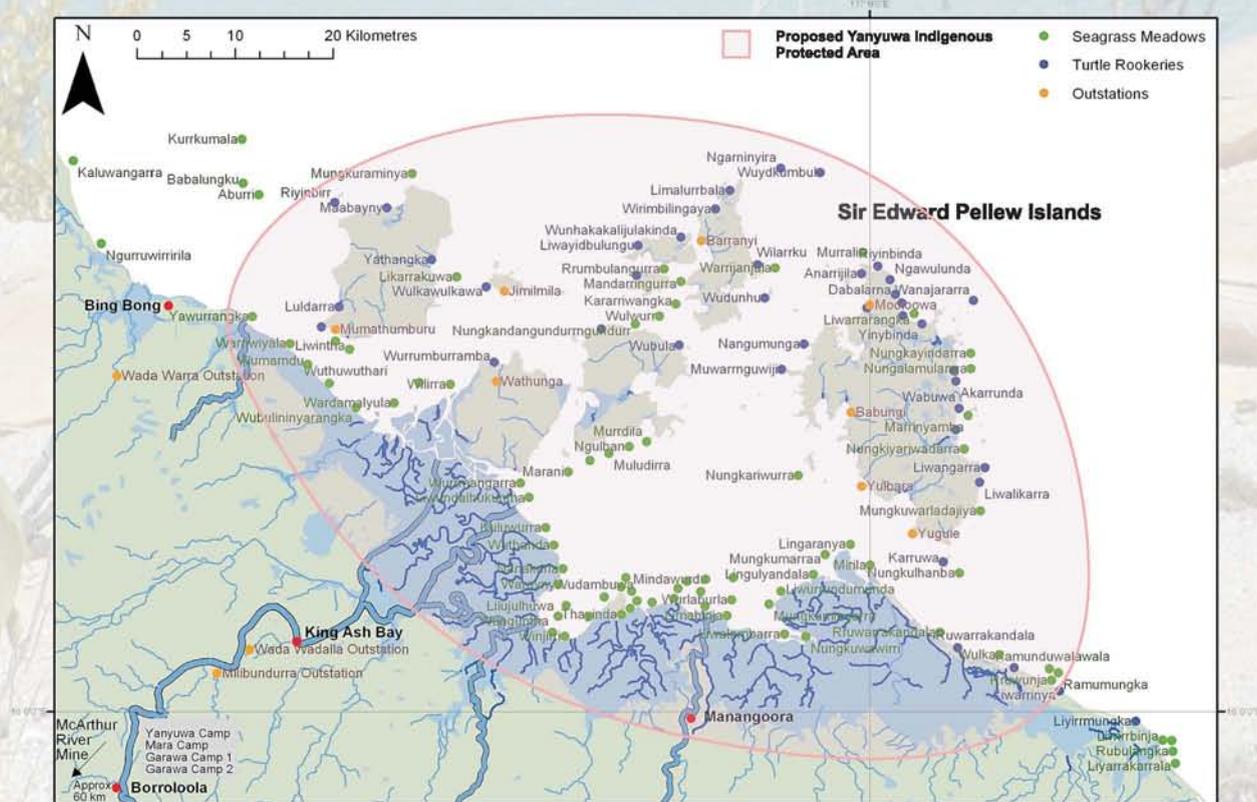
Under Yanyuwa Law, our Sea Country has always been a form of 'Protected Area'; it has been used and managed sustainably by our people for thousands of years, and protected from over exploitation by outsiders.

The Barranyi (North Island) National Park which we jointly manage with the Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service, was established in 1992.

We now want to extend protected area management so that all of our Sea Country is once more used and managed sustainably.

Objective

We wish to establish the **Yanyuwa Indigenous Protected Area**, comprising our islands, coastal wetlands and marine areas, so that all cultural and natural values are protected and to ensure that all resource use in the area is managed sustainably. We wish to include Barranyi (North Island) National Park within the management of the Indigenous Protected Area and negotiate with the Northern Territory Government for co-management of the marine areas within the Indigenous Protected Area.



Proposed Yanyuwa Indigenous Protected Area

Strategies and Actions

1. Seek funding from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Water Resources to explore the potential to declare all or some of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands and coastal wetlands and adjacent marine areas an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).
2. IPA funding to be used to cover costs of consultations with Traditional Owners about the IPA concept and for visits by TOs to Dhimurru and Groote Eylandt IPAs to learn more about IPA declaration and management.
3. Seek support from Northern Territory Parks and Wildlife Service (Department of Natural Resources, Infrastructure and the Arts) for consideration of an IPA over the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, coastal wetlands and adjacent marine areas.
4. If TOs decide to proceed with an IPA declaration, further funds would be sought for developing and implementing an IPA Plan of Management.
5. Negotiate with Northern Territory Government and other stakeholders regarding the co-management of marine areas within the proposed Yanyuwa Indigenous Protected Area.

Issue 2: FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

We recognise that commercial fishers rely on our Sea Country for their livelihood and that people come from all over Australia and overseas to enjoy recreational fishing in our Sea Country. We also understand that tourism operators and charter boat owners make their living by providing services to people wishing to visit our Sea Country and share our resources.

We are concerned, however, that the management of commercial and recreational fishing does not properly recognise Yanyuwa rights and obligations and does not protect our traditional fishery from the impacts of commercial and recreational fishing.

Objective

To reform fisheries management in Yanyuwa Sea Country so that Yanyuwa rights and obligations are properly respected and that ALL fisheries in our Sea Country (traditional, commercial and recreational) are managed sustainably.

Strategies and Actions

1. Negotiate with NT Fisheries and Australian Fisheries Management Authority to amend current fisheries closure areas and seasons to adequately protect the Yanyuwa traditional fishery and cultural practices; this includes extending the current MacArthur River closure so that it begins on the south-east tip of South West Island running eastwards to take in the mudbank (*Nungkumarraa*) and down to the eastern bank of Fat Fellows Creek.
2. Seek training and other support from NT Fisheries and the Australian Fisheries Management Authority to determine catch levels in our traditional fishery, and to monitor the impacts of commercial and recreational fishing on our traditional fishery.
3. Develop protocols for use of information about our traditional fishery to ensure respect for cultural knowledge, Yanyuwa intellectual property and Traditional Owner authority.
4. Negotiate a Yanyuwa Sea Country Code of Conduct to guide the activities of commercial fishers, recreational fishers and tourism operators; issues to be addressed in the Code of Conduct include.
 - ~ Respecting Traditional Owners' cultural authority to grant permission to access Yanyuwa Sea Country and resources.
 - ~ Respecting Yanyuwa cultural obligation to share benefits obtained from accessing and using Sea Country.
5. Negotiate with NT Fisheries, Australian Fisheries Management Authority and representatives of commercial and recreational fishers to hold an annual Yanyuwa Sea Country Management Forum to address all fisheries management issues in our Sea Country.



Commercial fisheries must be properly managed to protect our traditional food resources and culture.

Issue 3: PROTECTING YANYUWA CULTURAL SITES

All Yanyuwa Country is important to us spiritually, culturally and economically. However, some areas are especially important to us because of their significance in Yanyuwa creation stories and their continuing importance for our cultural identity and beliefs. Sustainable management of our Sea Country will only be achieved when our sacred places, Dreaming tracks and other cultural sites are respected and protected.

Objective

To ensure that our culturally significant areas are respected and protected throughout Yanyuwa Sea Country.

Strategies and Actions

1. Negotiate recognition and protection of Yanyuwa cultural sites as part of protected area management, fisheries management and tourism management within our Sea Country.

2. Promote an understanding of the significance of Yanyuwa sites among all users and managers of our sea Country.
3. Continue research and recording of Yanyuwa cultural sites for use in Sea Country planning and management, with the informed consent of Yanyuwa Traditional Owners.
4. Include the monitoring of Yanyuwa cultural sites in the roles and responsibilities of li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers, in collaboration with other Sea Country managers.
5. Consider nominating Yanyuwa cultural sites for listing on NT or national heritage registers.
6. Through appropriate signage, zoning and management actions, protect all the Macassan sites on our Sea Country; these sites are part of the shared history of Yanyuwa and Macassan peoples and an important record of Australia's pre-European history.



Steve Johnstone and his son (Steve) at a Macasan site on Little Vanderlin Island

Issue 4: MONITORING SEA COUNTRY

We recognise that sustainable use and management of Yanyuwa Sea Country requires our active involvement in monitoring all the cultural and natural values that make this unique coastal, island and marine environment so important to us and to others. To achieve this we will need to further develop our capacity for surveillance on land and sea, and work in collaboration with government agencies that have management responsibilities in our Sea Country.

Objective

To take a key role in monitoring all the cultural and natural values of Yanyuwa Sea Country, through development of our land and sea surveillance capabilities and through collaboration with government management agencies.

Strategies and Actions

1. Further develop the surveillance capabilities of the li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers to undertake active monitoring of cultural and natural values throughout Yanyuwa Sea Country;
2. Negotiate agreements (individually or collectively) with government management agencies to collaborate in monitoring Yanyuwa Sea Country; these agencies include NT Fisheries, NT Parks and Wildlife Commission, Australian Fisheries Management Authority; Australian Customs Service and Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service;
3. Negotiate training, cadetships, work experience and exchange programs to enable Yanyuwa people to gain the necessary skills for monitoring Sea Country and for maximising opportunities to collaborate with government agencies (including participation in fisheries observer programs);



li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers patrolling Yanyuwa Sea Country

Issue 5: COMMUNICATION

We recognise that we must communicate the significance of our Cultural values and places to other Sea Country users and managers if we want them to respect these values and places. Information provided on the Yanyuwa web site⁵, the liaison roles undertaken by our li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers and the publication of this *Sea Country Plan* already contribute to achieving this communication goal.

Objective

To assist commercial fishers, recreational fishers, tourists, government agency staff and the general community to better understand the significance of Yanyuwa cultural values and places associated with our Sea Country.

Strategies and Actions

1. Produce and install interpretive signs at appropriate locations to provide information about Yanyuwa values and sites.
2. Produce and distribute a brochure to inform visitors, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, government agencies and others about cultural values and sites associated with Yanyuwa Sea Country.
3. Provide cross-cultural education and information services to commercial fishers, recreational fishers, government agencies and others to assist them to understand Yanyuwa cultural values and sites associated with our sea Country.



A Yanyuwa girl with a turtle hatchling

⁵www.yanyuwa.org.au

Issue 6: TOURISM

We are not surprised that people from around Australia and overseas wish to experience the beauty and diversity of our Sea Country. We are happy to welcome them provided they respect our cultural values, do not damage our precious environment and contribute to our local economy.

Objective

To achieve a tourist industry that respects Yanyuwa culture and sites, does not damage our environment or deplete our natural resources, and provides economic and other benefits to Yanyuwa people and the general local community.

Strategies and Actions

1. Negotiate with tourism industry representatives to ensure that all tourism operators comply with the Yanyuwa Sea Country Code of Conduct.
2. Investigate opportunities for the tourism industry to contribute to Yanyuwa economic and social development, including options such as:
 - ~ contributing a Yanyuwa Sea Country management fee to assist in resourcing the operations of the li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers;
 - ~ training and employment of Yanyuwa people;
 - ~ Joint business ventures with Yanyuwa people or organisations;
 - ~ Supporting a permit system to access Aboriginal coastal land and islands.

Issue 7: RESEARCH

Many researchers have worked with us to document Yanyuwa culture, history, connection to Country, traditional knowledge and use of our natural resources. In most instances we have developed long-lasting, mutually respectful relationships. We are also keen to develop our capacity to researching our own Country and culture and to ensure that information obtained during research projects remains our intellectual property and under our control.

Objective

To increase our understanding of Yanyuwa culture, Country and natural resource management through collaboration with researchers, to develop our own capacity to undertake research and to ensure that

information obtained through research remains our intellectual property and under Yanyuwa control.

Strategies and Actions

1. Develop a research protocol that requires researchers to obtain permission from, and collaborate with, Traditional Owners for any research carried out on Yanyuwa Sea Country and respect Yanyuwa intellectual property rights and control over information obtained during research.
2. Negotiate education and training programs to enable Yanyuwa people to develop skills to undertake research on Yanyuwa Sea Country.



Yanyuwa kids taking part in turtle tracking research

Issue 8: DUGONG AND MARINE TURTLE MANAGEMENT

Dugongs and marine turtles are particularly important to Yanyuwa identity, culture and economy. We are determined to ensure that our harvest of these animals is sustainable and that the environments on which they depend are protected from damage and pollution.

We have long been involved in dugong and marine turtle research and monitoring and will continue to do so. We are currently implementing our Regional Activity Plan (RAP) for Dugong and Marine Turtle

management developed in 2005 with the support of the Northern Land Council and the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) and funded by the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Water Resources.

The RAP identifies the following threats to dugongs and marine turtles in Yanyuwa Sea Country:

- Recorded incidence of 'black fat and jelly meat' in harvested marine turtles and dugong.
- Recorded incidence of turtles with 'floaters syndrome'.
- Anecdotal reports of stunted dugong.
- Potential degradation of seagrass beds caused by unregulated access by recreational and commercial vessels.
- Potential impact to turtle and dugong feeding and breeding behaviour from increased vessel traffic in seagrass areas.
- Lack of understanding of seagrass habitat - extent, distribution and the natural and anthropogenic effects on seagrass availability for marine turtle and dugong populations.
- Lack of knowledge of population levels and trends for marine turtles and dugong.
- Lack of understanding of traditional and international commercial harvest levels in all regions of green turtle migration range affecting the local marine turtle population.
- Potential effects of lights at Bing Bong Port on

hatchling turtles, particularly major Flatback/Green nesting area on West Island.

- Potential threats to marine turtle and dugong from incidental catch in commercial nets, boat strike, ingestion and entanglement of marine debris (turtles), turtle egg predation by feral pigs and dogs on mainland coast.
- Potential impacts from Bing Bong Port shipping operations e.g. dredging, offshore lead concentrate loading operations, ballast water release.
- Overall lack of research, monitoring and management of the marine turtle and dugong populations of the Sir Edward Pellew Island and coastal management area.

Objective

To ensure that sustainable use and management of dugongs and marine turtles and the protection of the environments on which they depend, through the implementation of the Regional Activity Plan.

Strategies and Actions

The Yanyuwa Regional Activity Plan for Dugong and Marine Turtle management identifies the following activities to be implemented in 2006/2007:

1. **Dugong and Marine Turtle Monitoring:**
 - Maintain and develop programs and databases for monitoring turtle and



The future health of our people and culture depends on taking care of our dugongs

dugongs including mortality, catch and other population and ecological data. Data collected relating to traditional take to be owned by Traditional hunters and not to be used for public information purposes unless deemed appropriate by Traditional hunters.

- Monitoring includes the tagging and measuring of nesting Flatback turtles, tagging and measuring turtles with 'floaters syndrome', recording of nesting success and nest counts during 2 week intensive nesting study (Traditional Owner and community involvement), and monitoring of hatchling success from hatched nests during monthly track counts of 5 index beaches.
- Provide accurate information to Traditional Owners regarding turtle and dugong health and possible causes.
- Train Rangers and Traditional Owners in monitoring.

2. Education/Information Sharing:

- Public education of tourists and recreational fishermen regarding local knowledge, go slow areas (dugong and turtle feeding areas), protocol and access to Aboriginal island nesting sites.
- Promote reporting of sick, injured and dead dugongs and marine turtles by tourists, fishermen and the general community.

3. Ecological Impact Management

- Collation of historical camper night data from King Ash Bay Fishing Club to assist in identifying visitation trends. Joint patrols with Marine and Fisheries Enforcement patrols during Easter Fishing Classic. These patrols raise credibility and public profile of Sea Ranger Unit. This engenders respect for Rangers as managers, encourages public reporting and appropriate visitor behaviour.

Issue 9: IMPLEMENTING THE SEA COUNTRY PLAN

Implementing the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* requires:

- Human resources, equipment, infrastructure and funds to follow through with the proposed Strategies and Actions;
- Continuing engagement with all sectors of Yanyuwa society to ensure that

implementation of the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* meets their needs and aspirations; and

- Development of appropriate partnerships with government agencies, the fishing industry, the tourism industry and other stakeholders.

Objective

To achieve the Objectives of the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan*, in collaboration with government agencies, industry and other stakeholders.

Strategies and Actions

1. Negotiate funding for the employment of a Yanyuwa Sea Country Facilitator, to coordinate the implementation of the Sea Country Plan.
2. Engage regularly with all sectors of Yanyuwa society (particularly women and youth) to ensure that implementation of the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan* is meeting the needs and aspirations of Yanyuwa people.
3. Negotiate partnerships with government agencies, industry organisations, conservation organisations and other stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of the proposed Strategies and Actions.
4. Negotiate a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) and/or a Regional Partnership Agreement (RPA) to achieve whole of government support for the implementation of the *Yanyuwa Sea Country Plan*, including long term funding for the li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers.



Our li-Anthawirriyarra Rangers need secure funding and partnerships to continue their work protecting Yanyuwa Sea Country.

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